

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

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

The place to begin is a strange midrash recording an encounter between the Roman governor Tyrannus Rufus 1 and Rabbi Akiva. (Quintus Tineius Rufus, Roman governor of Judaea during the Bar Kochba uprising. He is known in the rabbinic literature as "the wicked". His hostility to Jewish practice was one of the factors that provoked the uprising.)

Rufus began the conversation by asking, "Whose works are better, those of G-d or of man?" Surprisingly, the Rabbi replied, "Those of man." Rufus responded, "But look at the heavens and the earth. Can a human being make anything like that?" Rabbi Akiva replied that the comparison was unfair. "Creating heaven and earth is clearly beyond human capacity. Give me an example drawn from matters that are within human scope." Rufus then said, "Why do you practise circumcision?" To this, Rabbi Akiva replied, "I knew you would ask that question. That is why I said in advance that the works of man are better than those of G-d."

The rabbi then set before the governor ears of corn and cakes. The unprocessed corn is the work of

G-d. The cake is the work of man. Is it not more pleasant to eat cake than raw ears of corn? Rufus then said, "If G-d really wants us to practise circumcision, why did He not arrange for babies to be born circumcised?" Rabbi Akiva replied, "G-d gave the commands to Israel to refine our character." (Tanhuma, Tazria, 5) This is a very odd conversation, but, as we will see, a deeply significant one. To understand it, we have to go back to the beginning of time.

The Torah tells us that for six days G-d created the universe and on the seventh he rested, declaring it holy. His last creation, on the sixth day, was humanity: the first man and the first woman. According to the sages, Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit already on that day and were sentenced to exile from the Garden of Eden. However, G-d delayed the execution of sentence for a day to allow them to spend Shabbat in the garden. As the day came to a close, the humans were about to be sent out into the world in the darkness of night. G-d took pity on them and showed them how to make light. That is why we light a special candle at Havdalah, not just to mark the end of Shabbat but also to show that we begin the workday week with the light G-d taught us to make.

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

(This is also signalled in the Havdalah prayer which mentions five havdalot, "distinctions", between sacred and profane, light and darkness, Israel and the nations, Shabbat and the weekdays, and the final "who distinguishes between sacred and profane." This parallels Genesis 1 in which the verb lehavdil -- to distinguish, separate -- appears five times.)

That is why the Mishkan was inaugurated on the eighth day. As Nechama Leibowitz and others have

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated by Rabbi Dov and Miriam Lerner's new daughter on the occasion of her making them new parents! I love you and can't wait to find out my name!
PS - so sorry for keeping you up all night still getting used to this whole in-body experience



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noted, there is an unmistakable parallelism between the language the Torah uses to describe G-d's creation of the universe and the Israelites' creation of the Sanctuary. The Mishkan was a microcosm -- a cosmos in miniature. Thus Genesis begins and Exodus ends with stories of creation, the first by G-d, the second by the Israelites. The eighth day is when we celebrate the human contribution to creation.

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

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

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

Now we begin to understand the full depth of the conversation between Rabbi Akiva and the Roman governor Tineius Rufus. For the Romans, the Greeks and the ancient world generally, the gods were to be

found in nature: the sun, the sea, the sky, the earth and its seasons, the fields and their fertility. In Judaism, G-d is beyond nature, and his covenant with us takes us beyond nature also. So for us, not everything natural is good. War is natural. Conflict is natural. The violent competition to be the alpha male is natural. Jews -- and others inspired by the G-d of Abraham -- believe, as Kathryn Hepburn said to Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*, that "Nature, Mr Allnut, is what we are put in this world to rise above."

The Romans found circumcision strange because it was unnatural. Why not celebrate the human body as G-d made it? G-d, said Rabbi Akiva to the Roman governor, values culture, not just nature, the work of humans not just the work of G-d. It was this cluster of ideas -- that G-d left creation unfinished so that we could become partners in its completion; that by responding to G-d's commands we become refined; that G-d delights in our creativity and helped us along the way by teaching the first humans how to make light -- that made Judaism unique in its faith in G-d's faith in humankind. All of this is implicit in the idea of the eighth day as the day on which G-d sent humans out into the world to become His partners in the work of creation.

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

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

G-d created physical nature: the nature charted by science. But He asks us to be co-creators, with Him, of human nature. As R. Abraham Mordecai Alter of Ger said. "When G-d said, 'Let us make man in our image', to whom was He speaking? To man himself. G-d said to man, Let us -- you and I -- make man together." (Likkutei Yehudah) The symbol of that co-creation is the eighth day, the day He helps us begin to create a world of light and love. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The major subject of this week's as well as next week's Torah portion is ritual purity and impurity (tuma and tahara), to the modern mind one of the

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

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

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

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

A well-known midrash takes this one step farther: “Turnus Rufus the wicked once asked Rabbi Akiva: Whose works are better, the works of 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).

Rabbi Yitzhak Arama (author of the Akedat Yitzhak Biblical Commentary) explains this to mean that there are no specific advantages or necessary rationalizations for doing the commandments; they are merely the will of 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 subject to scientific rules of health and illness, life and death. The most obvious and tragic expression of our physicality is that, in line with all creatures of the universe, we humans as well are doomed to be born, disintegrate and die. And therefore the most radical example of ritual impurity is a human corpse (avi avot hatuma); an animal carcass, a dead reptile, and the blood of the menstrual cycle (fall-out of the failed potential of fertilization) likewise cause ritual impurity. A woman in childbirth has a very close brush with death—both in terms of her own mortality and during the painful anguished period preceding the moment when she hears the cry of a healthy, living baby.

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

This was the message which Rabbi Akiva attempted to convey to Turnus Rufus the wicked. Yes, the world created by the Almighty is beautiful and magnificent, but it is also imperfect and incomplete. 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The ritual of circumcision has been one of the basic institutions of Jewish life since the beginnings of our familial and national existence. It is this covenant of our father Avraham which has always been a testament to the eternity of the Jewish people, to its heritage and identity.

As in the case of Avraham circumcising his son Yitzchak on the eighth day after the infant's birth, the Torah emphasizes this matter in this week's Torah reading. The eighth day always has significance in Jewish thought and life. It is a day of action and of looking forward, of the future and not merely of the nostalgic past. The ritual of circumcision consecrates the boy to a life of service and holy purpose.

It channels the life giving force that lies within him to nobility and circumspection, in avoidance of wanton lust and dissolute behavior. It is the covenant that is inscribed in our very flesh that constantly marks our identities as Jews and signals our loyalty to our faith and tradition. That is why the ceremony of circumcision is always a joyous one marked with a festive meal and a gathering of friends and family.

The prophet said twice: "In your blood shall you live." One of these instances refers to the blood of the infant at the moment of his circumcision. It is the blood of life and hope, of purpose and of uniqueness.

Throughout the ages, the Jewish ritual of circumcision has been under attack. The Greeks thought it to be a mutilation of the human body, which to them was their temple of worship. The Romans banned it because to them it was a symbol of the Jewish nationalism that they endeavored so mightily to crush and extinguish forever.

Much of the Christian world, in separating itself from its Jewish roots, objected to and ridiculed the practice of circumcision. They could not refute its biblical origin but claimed that its time had passed, with the coming of this "new" faith completely replacing the "old" one. But the Jews steadfastly maintained their practice of circumcision for their infant boys and for those males who wished to convert to Judaism.

This characteristic Jewish stubbornness continually angered the Christian world with many a blood libel and pogrom caused by the insistence of Jews to circumcise their male children. In the modern era in the western world where Christianity waned and weakened, the attack on Jewish circumcision practices nevertheless continued though in a different form.

Now these attacks took on a "humanitarian"

coloration, supposedly protecting the helpless infant from the pain and discomfort of circumcision. The banning of circumcision by legislative action became the favorite tactic of those who wanted to rid their societies of Jews and Judaism.

And this struggle against the covenant and people of Avraham continues today throughout parts of Europe. Some of this is still a legacy of the communist ideology of the Soviet Union that banned circumcision in its "workers' paradise" for many decades until its own collapse. But behind all attempts to discredit and attack circumcision lies the unreasoning hatred of the Jewish people. It is an age-old battle. © 2016 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

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion begins with discussing a mother's 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, G-d commands Avraham (Abraham) to circumcise all males of his household. (Genesis 17:9-14) Precisely at that time, G-d 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)

Additionally, 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 Ezekiel 16:6)

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, is that counterpoint. Interestingly, milah 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. ©2016 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.

DAN LIFSHITZ

Weekly Dvar

The primary subject of Parshat Tazria is tzara'at, a supernatural skin disease that, according to the Sages, was a punishment for speaking ill about other people. A person who habitually spoke ill about others would be struck with tzara'at and would then be quarantined outside the city as a divine warning to improve their behavior and make themselves more worthy of dwelling within the community. Although the symptoms of tzara'at were fairly straightforward, the official diagnosis could only be made by a kohen, who would declare whether a given patch of skin contained tzara'at or not. The Torah describes one type of skin lesion called a "bohak" that is not tzara'at, but is required to be shown to a kohen as well. R' Moshe Feinstein asks about the purpose of this -- if it is not tzara'at, why does the Torah trouble people to show it to the kohen?

R' Moshe Feinstein explains based on the insight mentioned earlier. The purpose of tzara'at is to cause a person to evaluate their behavior and to make improvements. The trauma of being quarantined outside the city for a week or more is clearly a strong catalyst for such self-examination, similar to the way serious illness or loss of a job triggers self-examination in our day. But we must not wait for such dramatic events to examine our actions. The law of the bohak teaches us that even smaller events in our lives should be seen as catalysts for introspection and self-

improvement. We can never know for certain what messages G-d is trying to send us, but we should always be listening, whether the message is loud or not. ©2016 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

In this week's Torah portion, the Torah deals with various types of tzoraas, commonly mistranslated as leprosy. Tzoraas is a Heavenly affliction that strikes a person for various transgressions he committed, most commonly for slandering a friend.

Embedded in this form of Divine retribution are miraculous properties, one of which is that it targets not only a person but his belongings -- his house, clothing and possessions.

The verse at the end of this week's Torah portion instructs the kohein how to treat tzoraas when it afflicts clothing. The posuk uses a singular expression; "vehinei lo hofach hanega es eino." If the kohein sees that the garment even after being washed remains unclean -- still contains signs of tzoraas -- it must be destroyed.

The language vehinei lo hofach hanega es eino is laden with symbolic meaning. Ayno, literally means "its eye," which means the blemish [tzoraas] has not changed its eye. This unusual choice of words contains profound insights into human nature, and the working of Divine justice, explains the saintly Chidushei Harim.

He notes that punishment of tzoraas is brought about by tzoras hoayin, literally narrowness of the eye. [Note the similarity between tzoraas and tzoras.] Narrowness of the eye refers to a person's tendency to view another through negative, critical lenses. His is not the benevolent, charitable gaze of a tov ayin, who sees the good in others, who hopes and prays for his neighbor's well-being. The "tzar ayin" perceives only another's shortcomings and flaws; he begrudges his neighbor's good fortune and is preoccupied with his own ego.

The Chidushei Harim explains that when the verse says 'vehinei lo hofach hanega es eino,' the tzoraas did not change its appearance, a double meaning is implied. The affliction didn't change because the ayin, (eye) -- the person's negative outlook -- did not change. Since the person failed to do teshuva for his callous view and behavior toward his fellow Jew, the tzoraas continues to attach itself to his clothes.

We explain that the word "nega" (affliction) is really the same word as "oneg" (pleasure), and is spelled with identical Hebrew letters except for one difference -- the location of the ayin. In oneg, the ayin is at the very beginning of the word; in nega, the ayin is at the end.

Everything is dependent on our hofach es eino, changing the eye. If we have a "good eye," taking a positive approach to others and to life, life then

becomes a pleasure and a delight. We are connected to the Divine for we see the innate goodness and Divine energy within one another. However, the metzora who continues to demonstrate mean-spiritedness remains with the nega; he has not been able to change his "eye." He is preoccupied only with himself and therefore, is appropriately afflicted.

Most of us have a bit of tzar ayin in our nature. A Jew's responsibility is to convert that trait and become a tov ayin, a person with a benevolent eye.

In Biblical times, only when the metzora succeeded in uprooting his negativism toward others did the affliction disappear. Today, we do not have that powerful incentive to spur us to change. Yet it is still incumbent on us to try to improve our character. When we have "a good eye," we are happy with our lot and judge others charitably. We walk with a spring in our step and uplifted spirit. We are at peace.

If we harbor feelings of being shortchanged and look at others begrudgingly, however, then we are truly afflicted. Although highlighting others' shortcomings may be temporarily gratifying, keeping a jaundiced eye will prove toxic in the end -- to ourselves. ©2016 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**R**abbi Simlai said, 'just as the formation of man was after all other wildlife in the creation story, so were his laws explained after the laws regarding wildlife' (Rashi on Vayikra 12:2). Vayikra Rabbah (14:1, Rashi's source) quotes a verse from last week's Parasha (11:46), "this is the (corpus of) law regarding [the animal kingdom]" and from this week's (12:2), "when a woman conceives and gives birth" to prove the point. Although this does not automatically mean that the laws of ritual impurity regarding the animal kingdom and of man are one unit, with those of the animal kingdom taught first in that same unit, several Rishonim (e.g. Ran and Rabbeinu Krescas on Gittin 60a-b) say that they are all part of one "section," the one the Talmud calls "Parashas T'mayim," one of the eight sections Rabbi Levi says were taught on the day the Mishkan was set up. Those who understand "Parashas T'mayim" to be referring to a different section need not consider all of this to be one unit, but we would still need to understand why these laws, which were needed as soon as the Mishkan was up and operating, were not taught then.

Last week (<http://tinyurl.com/zpmn4bm>) I contrasted the Sifre Zuta's list (Bamidbar 7:11) of 15 times that G-d communicated with Moshe on the first day of the Mishkan with Rabbi Levi's list of the eight sections taught that day, and suggested (based on the context of the Talmud) that Rabbi Levi was only referring to those sections that were written down then too (as opposed to being written down 38+ years later,

when the completed text of the Torah was given to the nation). As far as why only eight sections were written down if more were taught then (as many as nine more, since only six of Rabbi Levi's eight are included in the Sifre Zuta's list), I also suggested that whenever Moshe was told to "speak" to the nation to teach them what he was about to be taught, it infers to only speak to them, i.e. teach it to them orally, but not to give it to them in writing. Which brings the question back to what the Ran (et al) considers to be "Parashas T'mayim," as for some of these laws Moshe is told to "speak" to the nation (Vayikra 12:2, 15:2), as opposed to writing them down. How can these laws be included in "Parashas T'mayim" if Moshe being told to "speak to the nation" precludes them from being writing down (then), thereby disqualifying them from being one of Rabbi Levi's eight sections?

Although I didn't include it as one of the possibilities last week (because I haven't seen it suggested by anyone), it's possible that "Parashas T'mayim" only refers to the laws of "tzora'as," which are not introduced by instructions that Moshe "speak" to the nation. We would still need to figure out why other laws of "tumah" (ritual impurity) were either not taught that day or not to be written down (yet), but the sheer quantity and complexity of the laws of "tzora'as" could have made it necessary to put them in writing right away. Nevertheless, those with the same opinion as the Ran (see the commentary based on a manuscript that was attributed to the Ritva) includes not only the "tumah" of animals (11:29-43) in "Parashas T'mayim," but also the "tumah" resulting from childbirth (12:2-8) and the "tumah" that accompanies bodily emissions (15:2-33), even though Moshe was told to teach these orally, which implies not (yet) writing them down.

Although the other opinions about what "Parashas T'mayim" refers to could easily say that these laws were all taught on the "Eighth Day," the first day of the fully-functioning Mishkan, but were not written down then (so didn't qualify to be considered "Parashas T'mayim"), the Sifre Zuta's list includes all communications between G-d and Moshe from that day, not just those that were written down. Since the laws of "tumah" needed to be known then, why weren't they communicated to Moshe that day as well?

The section about the "tumah" created by animal carcasses (11:1-43) begins with G-d telling Moshe and Aharon to "say to them" (11:1), followed by the instructions "speak to the Children of Israel" (11:2) to tell them about the laws that follow. Although the first set of laws is about which animals are kosher, "tumah" plays a role here too (see 11:4-8, especially 11:8 regarding not even touching the carcasses of non-kosher animals, and 11:24-28); even the Ran (et al), who quotes 11:29 as being the start of "Parashas T'mayim," likely only did so because the opening words of that paragraph, "and this is for you what is tamay,"

make it clear that it is about "tumah," even though 11:1 is really where "Parashas T'mayim" starts. After all, why would the "tumah" mentioned before 11:29 be excluded? This is especially true since there are no other opening words ("and G-d spoke to Moshe") after 11:1 until 12:1, so the entire chapter has to be part of the same communication. It would therefore seem that what the Ran (et al) says is "Parashas T'mayim" is everything between 11:1 and 16:1 (where another of Rabbi Levi's eight sections begins), as it is all part of one larger unit of "tumah." Whatever reason the Sifre Zuta had for not including this communication in the list of "Eighth Day communications" would therefore apply to this entire unit.

Toras Kohanim (quoted by Rashi on 11:1) addressing the seeming redundancy of "say to them" (11:1) followed by "speak to the Children of Israel" (11:2), explains that Moshe and Aharon should "say it to Elazar and Isamar" before it was "told to the Children of Israel." This sequence (what G-d taught Moshe being taught to Aharon, then to Aharon's sons, and then to the nation) was how the Torah was always taught (see Eiruvin 54b); there are several reasons given why Aharon's sons are mentioned explicitly here. [Rashi (11:2), implying that things were different here, says that they were put in the same category as Aharon because they were all equally silent (read: accepting of G-d's judgment) regarding the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. Vayikra Rabbah (13:1) says that they merited being included here because they remained quiet when Moshe scolded them for burning the offering instead of eating it (10:16-17) even though they knew they were right.] Ramban (see also Ibn Ezra) says that the laws taught here had to be known by the Kohanim, so it was appropriate to teach it to them first. This is especially true regarding "tzora'as," where the Kohanim had to know all the intricate details in order to determine the status of what was shown to them. I would therefore suggest that this unit was first taught to Aharon and his sons during the seven days of training that led up to the "Eighth Day." [Although Rashi says these "sons" were Elazar and Isamar, meaning it must have been taught after those seven days (or else Nadav and Avihu would have also been included), Midrash Lekach Tov and Targum Yonasan just say "Aharon's sons," which could be referring to all four of them.] The Kohanim were not allowed to leave the Mishkan compound that whole week (8:33), and had to know all of the laws included in what the Ran calls "Parashas T'mayim" right away, so it makes sense that, along with the details of the offerings, that week was spent learning the laws of "tumah."

If this unit was taught during the seven days of training, they were obviously communicated to Moshe before the "Eighth Day," so couldn't be included in the Sifre Zuta's list of "Eighth Day communications." Not only that, but if it was taught to Moshe who taught it to

Aharon and his sons orally during those seven days, it is possible that, according to the Ran (et al), Moshe was told to "speak to the Children of Israel" about the "tumah" created by childbirth and bodily emissions during those seven days as well. Instead of the implication being "don't write it down until the rest of the Torah is written down," the message to Moshe would be "speak to them now too," i.e. even before the Mishkan is fully operational (perhaps so that any emissions could be kept track of now). If Moshe was only being told "don't write it down just yet," i.e. this week, he was not precluded from writing it down after the Mishkan was operating and the details of the laws of "tumah" had to be known (and reviewed) by the nation. And if Moshe wrote it down for them then, it qualified as being one of the eight Torah sections written on the "Eighth Day." ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Sounds of Solitude

There is a fascinating paradox that relates to the laws of tzora'as, the spiritual malady, a skin discoloration that affects those who gossip. On one hand, only a kohen can either pronounce a state of impurity or purity. On the other hand, the afflicted man is in control of his own destiny. The Gemarah tells us that if, for example, the afflicted man removes the negah, whether it is hair or skin, then he is no longer tamei. So this affliction, which is purely spiritual in nature, a heavenly exhortation to repent from nattering ways, is basically toothless. If the man wills it, he can refuse to go to the kohen and not be declared tamei. And if he so desires, he can even remove the negah before anyone declares its potency.

Another amazing dimension is applicable after the afflicted man is declared tamei. The Torah tells us "that he is sent out of the camp, where he sits in solitude" (Leviticus 13:46).

His departure from the camp of Israelites is surely not due to a contagious nature of the negah. After all, if that were the case, he would be sent away way even before the kohen's declaration of tumah.

So why send the man to confinement where no one will monitor his reaction to the negah on his being, a place where he could remove the negah, or adulterate its appearance? Why not have him locked in a cell under the supervision of a guard who would insure the integrity of the purification process?

In the early 1900s, a simple religious Russian Jew decided that he could no longer stand the Czar's persecution. He would leave Russia to join his son who had settled in Houston, Texas, some twenty years earlier. The son, who had totally assimilated and was a successful oilman, was thrown into a panic. "Of course, you are welcome, Pa," he cabled, "I will arrange a visa, your tickets and fares. But you must realize that I have a wonderful reputation here as an oil man. When you

arrive, you must adapt to American culture or I will be destroyed.

Upon arrival at the train station, the old man, dressed in his long coat and up-brimmed hat, was whisked to a haberdashery, where he was fitted with the latest style fedora and a modern-cut suit. But still, his father looked too Jewish.

"Pa it's not enough. I'll take you to the barber."

The first thing that came off was the beard. The son looked on and said, "it's not enough Pa. The peyos, they'll have to go." The barber cut off the right peya. While the son looked on proudly, his pa was becoming a real American. Then the second. And the old man began to weep.

"Why are you crying, Papa?" the son asked incredulously.

The father, resigned to his fate, simply answered. "I am crying because we lost the Alamo!"

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, in his sefer *Emes L'Yaakov*, explains the concept of sitting in solitude, reflecting in unadulterated honesty about one's true feelings.

There comes a time in one's life where the message from heaven can only be without the influence of others and the will to impress them. How often do we act because of the influence of friends and relatives? How often do we gossip due to peer pressure? We must make choices in life. Honest choices. We have to do what the neshama wants us to do. And we can't alter our true emotion due to social, peer, or monetary pressures.

Henny Youngman, a classic comedian, used to talk about his wonderful doctor. "If you can't afford the operation," he would say, "he'll touch up the x-ray!"

The afflicted man is sent away from anyone who may have influenced him to act in his blathering ways. He can reflect on his true feeling and his honest perceptions of life and his role. But this decision must be made when he is impervious to anyone who was normally in his sphere. And he has a choice. He can pull out the hair, he can scrape off the negah. He can fool the kohen. He can fool his family and fool his friends. But when he returns to the camp, the same man sans negah, the only one fooled is himself. ©2016 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And the Cohen shall see him on the seventh day" (Lev. 13:5). The Torah requires a Cohen to be the one to make the decision whether a person's skin affliction is actually tzora'as. This is because the Cohanim were spiritual people who taught wisdom to others. They would be able to advise those afflicted to check through their behavior and to correct their faults. They would also teach the person how to pray to the Almighty for help. Moreover, the Cohanim

themselves would pray for the welfare of the person. (Sforno commentary)

This is a lesson for someone who finds that the Almighty has sent him an affliction. Find a spiritual guide who will be able to point out areas in which you can improve yourself, ask him for advice on what to pray for and ask him to pray for you. Those who follow this procedure will gain much from their suffering. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2016 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Woman Who Gives Birth

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Our portion this week begins with the obligation of a woman who gives birth (*yoledet*) to offer two sacrifices—an *Oleh* and a *Chatat*. In essence this is really the obligation of the husband. Today, since the Holy Temple is not in existence and one cannot offer sacrifices, the husband is called to the Torah and given an *Aliya*. In addition the woman has the obligation to bring a thanksgiving offering (*karban Todah*) since a sick person who recovers must bring this sacrifice so also one who gives birth, when she recovers, must also offer a *Karban Todah*.

Today instead of the *Karban Todah* we say the *Birkat Hagomel* and on *Yom Haazmaut* (Israel Independence Day) we recite the Hallel in thanksgiving. When does the individual recite this blessing of "*Ha'gomel*"?

There are various opinions:

1. For one who just gave birth—she would wait seven days before she would recite this blessing
2. The husband recites the blessing and uses the language "*Shegemalech kol tov*" (who has granted to you all good) and the wife would respond on hearing this blessing by saying Amen.

3. In the absence of his wife the husband would recite the blessing using the formula "*shegamal l'ishti Kol Tuv*" (who has granted my wife all good).

The wife fulfills her obligation when her husband is called to the Torah and recites the blessing "*Barchu et Hashem Hamivorach*"

All this relates to the individual. However as a group we are all obligated to give thanks to Almighty G-d on the rebirth of our nation Israel as we celebrate our independence. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

