

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**A**t the start of this parsha is a cluster of laws that challenged and puzzled the commentators. They concern a woman who has just given birth. If she gives birth to a son, she is "unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period." She must then wait for a further thirty-three days before coming into contact with holy objects or appearing at the Temple. If she gives birth to a girl, both time periods are doubled: she is unclean for two weeks and must wait a further sixty-six days. She then has to bring two offerings: "When her purification period for a son or a daughter is complete, she shall bring to the Priest, to the Communion Tent entrance, a yearling sheep for a burnt offering, and a young common dove, or a turtle dove for a sin offering. [The priest] shall offer [the sacrifice] before God and atone for [the woman], thus cleansing her of the blood coming from her womb. This law applies whether a woman gives birth to a boy or to a girl." (Lev. 12:6-7)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What therefore bars us from entering the holy is anything that reminds us or others of our mortality: the fact that we are born and will one day die. Contact with death or even birth has this effect. Both therefore debar the person who has had such contact from the domain

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA  
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL  
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.  
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives and various websites. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any synagogue or organization.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL  
(973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

of the holy. Special, though different, processes of purification had to be undergone both by those who had come into contact with the dead (Num. 19:1-22) and by a mother who had given birth.

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

The woman who had just given birth was therefore teme'a, not because of the sin of Eve but because birth, like death, is a signal of mortality, which has no place in the Temple, the space set aside for consciousness of eternity and spirituality.

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

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

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

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

to establish that children belong to God. Parents are merely their guardians.

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

As for the sin offering, there is a fascinating rabbinic passage that sheds light on it. It describes a conversation between God and the angels prior to the creation of man: "When the Holy One, Blessed Be He, came to create man, He created a group of ministering angels and asked them, 'Do you agree that we should make man in Our image?'

"They replied, 'Sovereign of the universe, what will be his deeds?'

"God showed them the history of mankind.

"The angels replied, 'What is man that You are mindful of him?' [Let man not be created]. God destroyed the angels.

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

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

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

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

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

The child will one day sin: "There is none on earth so righteous as to do only good and never sin," says Ecclesiastes (7:20). So a mother brings a sin offering in advance to atone, as it were, for any sin the

child may commit while still a child, as if to say: "God, you knew humans would sin, yet still You created them and commanded us to bring new lives into the world. Therefore, please accept this sin offering in advance for any wrong my child may do."

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

Thus the sacrifices a woman brings on the birth of a child, and the period during which she is unable to enter the Temple, have nothing to do with any sin she may have committed or any "defilement" she may have undergone. They are, rather, to do with the basic fact of human mortality, together with the responsibility a parent undertakes for the conduct of a child, and an acknowledgement that every new life is the gift of God. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"If a woman has conceived seed and born a male child: then she shall be unclean for seven days; as in the days of her menstrual sickness shall she be unclean." (Leviticus 12:2) One of the greatest miracles of life is that of childbirth – and this Torah portion opens with the short state of impurity (bound up with the women's and child's close brush with death) and the much longer state of purity (because of the marvelous phenomenon of the continuity of life) which the mother must experience. And the Bible also commands the mother to bring two sacrifices (obviously during Temple times): a whole burnt offering, symbolizing the fact that all of life ultimately belongs to God, and a sin offering, usually explained as being necessary in case the woman took an oath never to become pregnant again while experiencing the pain of childbirth. What is strange about all this is that the mother is not commanded to give a thanksgiving offering, the most likely sacrifice one would expect to find in such a situation!

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

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

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

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

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

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

Israel largely returned “to business as usual.” Indeed, Moshe Dayan, when he first visited the Western Wall, kissed its stones with such visible emotion that a reporter asked if he had become a “born-again Jew.” Dayan honestly responded, “I was not religious yesterday and I will not be religious tomorrow. But at this moment, no one in Israel is more religious than I.”

This is how Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, famed nineteenth century dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva, answered our questions. It is sadly not within the nature of most people to sustain our feelings of thanksgiving; we are generally only concerned with what God has done for us lately, now, today. We all too easily forget God’s many bounties of yesterday – and certainly of last year and of five years ago. The offering for thanksgiving must therefore be consumed on the very day it was brought; by the next day, the feelings of gratitude will have dissipated. And since the woman may not offer a Temple sacrifice after childbirth until the periods of her impurity and purity have passed – forty days for a male child and eighty days for a female child – she cannot be expected to bring a thanksgiving offering such a long time after the birth. By then she may be so concerned with staying up at night and the vexations of a colicky offspring that the initial joy of birth may well have been forgotten. ©2019 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he opening portion of the Torah reading of this week deals with childbearing. Jewish tradition has to a great extent always been child centered. Bringing children into the world is one of the basic positive commandments of Judaism. Having children demonstrates a belief in the future and an optimistic view of life generally.

Everyone knows that raising children constitutes a great responsibility and enormous sacrifice on the part of parents. Nevertheless, the thrust in Judaism is always to create a family and be privileged to see generations. Seeing grandchildren and certainly great-grandchildren allows one to live, in an imaginative way, even beyond the grave. Judaism is a generational religion. It is not a religion that is self-centered but points to a higher purpose, a nobler life and through generations, it acquires a whiff of eternity.

The rabbis of the Talmud taught us long ago that one should not be deterred from creating a family lest the descendants of that family be people of disappointing behavior and immoral values. Having children and building a family is always risky business. There are no guarantees given even to the most righteous and pious of parents. The biblical narratives of the great men and women of Israel testify to the difficulties of rearing proper generations. Nevertheless, the Torah does not allow us to desist from bringing

children into the world and raising families. Creation is a divine attribute and procreation is the basic act of human purpose.

As part of the disastrous course that sections of Western civilization have taken in our time, we are witness to the complete denigration of having children and even of the very lives of infants. Children are a burden to one's career advancement, to the checkbook and to the leisure and freedom desired by many. In other sections of society, children are viewed only as to what they can contribute to the general society itself. If they are deemed to be unable to make such a contribution, then they are certainly worthless. We are witness to a return to the values of ancient Sparta where infants and small children who were weak or still physically underdeveloped, were simply taken out into the forests and allowed to die without sustenance or protection.

The abortion clinics are a major industry in Western society and their reach now touches even infants in the process of being born or even those having been born. If the mother somehow does not want the child, then it has become perfectly acceptable that that child should be done away with since it is a burden to all concerned.

This type of legalized murder is only a step away from genocide and murder that can be justified so to speak, by ideals, policies and economic theories. The Western world finds itself on a very slippery slope. God forbid, that it slips completely over the precipice. ©2019 *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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)*

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**here are many who believe that Jewish law links a menstruating woman (niddah) with that which is dirty. This because the word tameh, associated with the niddah (see for example Leviticus 12:2) is often defined as unclean.

If this were true, taharah, the antonym of tumah, would by implication be synonymous with cleanliness. However, Phinehas ben Jair, in a famous comment which was to contribute the outline of Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto's “The Path of the Just” (Mesillat Yesharim), said that Torah, precision, zeal, cleanliness, restraint, taharah, saintliness, meekness, and fear of sin in that order lead to holiness. We learn from this statement that cleanliness and taharah are two distinct categories. So too, is physical uncleanliness not synonymous with tumah.

The truth is that there are several terms in the Torah that have no suitable English equivalent. Such terms should not be translated. Leaving them in the

original Hebrew makes the reader understand that a more detailed analysis of the word is necessary. Tumah is one of those words that cannot be perfectly translated and requires a deeper analysis.

Rav Ahron Soloveichik suggested that the real meaning of tumah might be derived from the verse in Psalms, which says: "The fear of the Lord is tehorah, enduring forever." (Psalms 19:10) Taharah therefore means that which is everlasting and never deteriorates. Tumah, the antithesis of taharah, stands for mortality or finitude, that which withers away.

A dead body is considered a primary source of tumah, for it represents decay in the highest sense not only because the corpse itself is in the process of decaying, but also because the living individual who comes into contact with the corpse usually suffers emotionally and endures a form of spiritual fragmentation, a counterpart of the corpse's physical falling away.

The metzora (leper) whose body is encompassed with skin lesions is also considered in a state of tumah. The leper is tameh because he is slowly disintegrating, while those who associate with him decline emotionally as they observe the wasting away of another human being.

The ba'al keris (one who has had a seminal issue) and the niddah may fall into the same framework for they represent in the strictest sense the loss of potential life.

No wonder, then, the process of purification involves immersion in the mikveh, a natural body of water. This because, water is the clearest symbol of life—an appropriate spiritual antidote to tumah, which is nothing, less than what Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik described as "the whisper of death."

As much as we have tried to teach the real meaning of tumah and niddah, there are still so many who believe that halakhah links niddah with that which is dirty. This myth must be shattered, a myth that has made it emotionally difficult for many women to accept the laws of family purity. An appropriate understanding of niddah may lead to a greater observance of these important laws. ©2019 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 DAVID LEVINE**

### **Purification**

**T**he double parshiot of Tazria-Metzora concentrate on the concept of tumah and taharah, ritual uncleanliness and cleanliness. The parshiot are read separately this year because of the Jewish Leap Year. Parashat Tazria begins with the ritual uncleanliness after giving birth, but the primary uncleanliness that is discussed deals with tzara'at, a skin disease which is often mistranslated as leprosy.

We can be certain that this "disease" was not leprosy nor was it any other form of "skin disease" as no doctor is ever consulted either to diagnose this ailment or to prescribe medication or treatment. This disease is spiritual and can only be diagnosed by a Kohein, priest. Even if a Kohein is not an expert and must consult a Talmudic scholar for a proper description of the ailment, it is only the Kohein who may decide on this diagnosis. The treatment of a person afflicted with this ailment is isolation outside of the camp of Israel and only the Kohein may decide whether the person is "cured".

The Torah tells us that once a person is declared to be "cured," he must undergo a process by which he becomes ritually clean again. "This will be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification he shall be brought to the Kohein. The Kohein will go outside of the camp and the Kohein will look and behold the tzara'at affliction has been cured from the metzora. And the Kohein will command and there shall be taken for the person being purified two live, pure birds, cedar wood, a crimson (tongue) of wool, and hyssop. And the Kohein will command and the one bird will be slaughtered into an earthenware vessel over spring water. And the live bird, he shall take it and the cedar wood, and the crimson tongue of wool, and the hyssop, and he shall dip them into the blood of the bird which was slaughtered over the spring water. And he shall sprinkle seven times upon the person being purified from the tzara'at, he shall purify him and he shall set the live bird free upon the open field. And the one who is to be purified shall wash his garments, shave all of his hair, and immerse himself in the water and become pure, afterwards he will come into the camp and he will dwell outside of his tent seven days. On the seventh day he will shave all his hair, his head, and his beard, and his eyebrows, and all his hair shall he shave off and he will wash his garments and he will immerse his flesh in water and he will become pure."

There is a two-stage process which is followed for purification and atonement. We see here the week of purification conducted by the Kohein. This is not the atonement process which takes place on the eighth day. The atonement is much like that of the nazir and the anointing is the same as that for the Kohanim at the end of the inauguration. But there is an aspect of the metzora is different. Normally it is necessary for the individual to be conscious of the process through which he atones. There are four cases of people for whom these particular sacrifices may be brought even without their knowledge. These are people who must first reach a level of purity through one set of sacrifices before bringing other sacrifices for atonement. The metzora is one of these four and is known as a m'chuser kaparah, one who is missing atonement. HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that "all other offerings do not effect anybody but the person who brings them – it is his sin which is to be atoned for,

his acts, his life, which are to be brought near to Hashem – whereas the effect of tumah and taharah does essentially go beyond the person who is tamei or tahor, any object he touches becomes tamei not only for him but for the whole Jewish community, altogether the idea of tumah, which arises from his condition has to be rectified not only for him but for everybody who is summoned to taharah.”

Rashi discusses the symbolic meaning behind each of the items that must be brought by the metzora in the purification process. The two birds are a reminder of malicious talk against a fellow Jew by verbal twittering, and the birds are involved with the chirping of sound. The cedar wood comes from a tall tree that stands up straight, and the metzora is guilty of haughtiness. The tongue of crimson-dyed wool is a reminder that the crimson dye comes from a word, and the metzora should lower himself from his arrogance. The same is the message of the hyssop which is the closest to the ground of any tree. Hirsch explains that these birds are the d'ror, a name which indicates “freedom” and may be the sparrow. “The anti-social character of the wild, uncontrolled bird stands in direct contrast to the social character of the outcast who wishes once again to be accepted into human society. His reacceptance, however, is dependent on carrying out the command to ‘kill one of the birds,’ symbolizing that man must completely subject his previously uncontrolled, animal instincts to the overall moral demands of society.”

The Tanchuma lists eleven different sins, any of which could be a reason to be stricken with tzara'at: (1) serving a strange god, (2) profaning Hashem, (3) inappropriate sexual misconduct, (4) stealing, (5) speaking evil (gossiping), (6) causing lying testimony, (7) a judge confusing the law (perverting justice), (8) a false or unnecessary oath, (9) trespassing, (10) one who thinks false thoughts, and (11) one who causes strife between brothers. The idea behind each of these is similar. Each is caused by arrogance and haughtiness and highly unsociable behavior. While there are very few cases recorded of this affliction in the Tanach, and Hashem has withdrawn that punishment with the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, it is certainly evident that the sins which caused this affliction are still with us today.

The most difficult of these sins is lashon hara, speaking evil of someone else (gossiping). The Chofetz Chaim devoted his entire life to heightening our awareness of the intricacies of this sin. It is too easy to fall into the habit of making a comment about someone else, spreading information that could damage someone's reputation, or just listening to someone else speak about other people. Even at the risk of appearing rude, we must learn to avoid people who spend their time speaking about others. It is not easy to tell someone else to stop or to walk away. It is

almost as difficult as stopping ourselves. But the damage done to us and to others when we are part of lashon hara is too great to ignore the problem. May Hashem guide us and help us to withstand the temptation of lashon hara, and may we help through our efforts to bring true peace and love to us and to our world. © 2019 Rabbi D. Levine

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## Kohen...Kohen...GONE!

**P**arshas Tazria deals primarily with the physio-spiritual plague that affects gossips and rumor mongers with the plague of tzora'as. 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 nor does he enter a hospital. If afflicted 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. A physician or medical expert does not evaluate him. In fact, the entire ordeal is evaluated, reevaluated, determined, and executed by non-other than the Kohen. Moreover, the Torah does not keep that detail a secret. In the 47 verses that discuss bodily affliction of tzora'as, 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 pure" (Leviticus 13:1-47).

Why must the Torah include the Kohen's involvement in every aspect of the process? More so, why does the Torah mention the Kohen's involvement in almost every verse? Would it not been well enough to have one encompassing edict: "The entire process is supervised and executed according to the advice of the Kohen."

The parents of a retarded child entered the study of Rabbi Shlomo Auerbach. They 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," exclaimed 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 school and flourished. In fact, with the great feeling 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?

Part of the metzora's (leper's) healing process is dismissal 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 him through the tense incubation period as well as his dismissal. 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 turn 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 you may be leaving for somewhere outside the camp, you are definitely not gone. (*Adapted from: and from Jerusalem His Word, by Hanoach Teller ©1995 NYC Publishing*) ©2019 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### Yoledet

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**O**ur 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 (Kurban Todah) for just as 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. A Woman who just gave birth – 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).

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

There are also those who completely exempt the woman from reciting any blessing since the entire phenomenon of childbirth is an everyday miracle and occurrence and the essence of the blessing is really designed for one who sinned and is now well (hence the language Hagomel lechayavim tovtot—who has granted one who is guilty) but a woman who gives birth is not guilty of purposely doing anything wrong—quite the contrary – she has just performed the Mitzva of childbirth.

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. ©2019 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

## RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

### Perceptions

**"**If a person has upon his skin a white blotch, discoloration or spot and it is suspected of being a mark of the tzara'as affliction upon his skin, he shall be brought to Aharon Ha-Kohen, or one of his children the kohanim." (Vayikra 13:2) The kohen studied Michah's arm with great seriousness, and said, "Tzara'as of the skin is evaluated on the basis of three symptoms, and any one of them indicates that the tzara'as is advanced. One is a discoloration of the hair in the affected area, from the natural color to white."

Michah looked at the white blotch on his arm. He felt VERY uneasy, even humiliated.

He had been warned. "You're speaking loshon hara!" his friend Osniel had told him, "and I want no part of it!"

But the yetzer hara is powerful, and in some people overwhelming. Michah had a difficult time controlling his tongue, and an even more difficult time admitting when he hadn't.

"No I'm not!" he barked back. "I have a good REASON to say what I'm saying!"

"So did Miriam!" Osniel retorted, "and see what happened to her! White as snow! We're not told to remember what happened to her for no reason!"

Michah scrunched his face, recalling the episode with Moshe's sister, but still reluctant to give in.

"And you can't get much more l'Shem Shamayim than Moshe Rabbeinu!" Osniel continued. "He also was given tzara'as for what he said about the Jewish people!"

Now Michah looked away, defiant. He had a difficult time admitting he was wrong, his own undoing. There would come a time in history after the temples had been destroyed, and the Jewish people were exiled to distant lands, when a person could delude themselves as Michah now did. Divine Providence would become covert, making it possible for people to miss the Divine point of their suffering.

"Hmm," the kohen said, having difficulty finding enough signs to confirm that Michah indeed had tzara'as.

"What do you think?" Michah asked, a slight tremble in his voice, clearly humbled by the incident.

"Well," the kohen explained, "had your lesion met the criteria of tzara'as, I would have had to declare you tamei right now. But it doesn't..."

"So I'm okay?" a prematurely excited Michah asked.

"Not really," the kohen answered him. "I have to confine you to your home for seven days..."

"You mean I can't go out of my house for SEVEN days?"

"That's right," the kohen answered him, "or have visitors."

"Ouch!" Michah said, considering all the ramifications of his new status.

"It hurts, doesn't it?" the kohen asked him.

"It certainly does!" Michah answered.

"Well, imagine the impact of your loшон hara on the person you spoke about...and in the spiritual realms above!"

Michah could only look at the ground and feel a sense of shame. "You can fool some of the people some of the time," he thought to himself, "but God NONE of the time!" as his tzara'as made eminently clear.

The kohen could see that Michah was finally getting it. "I'll be back in seven days to check on you again...to see if you actually have tzara'as."

"What will you be looking for?"

"For one, to see if it spread in the meantime."

"And if it hasn't?" Michah asked, a little hopeful.

"Well," the kohen answered him. "There is a difference in protocol depending of the type of lesion. For example, for patches of the skin, another confinement period of seven days is necessary."

"ANOTHER SEVEN DAYS?!"

"That's right," he said, "And for boils or burns, a kohen declares it merely a tzareves..."

"A tzareves?" Michah asked. "What's that?"

"It's a scar. If it's only a scar, then there are no further examinations, but for bald patches or lesions of the scalp or beard, another confinement period of

seven days is also necessary. However prior to this second confinement period, the individual is shaved around the 'nesek,' leaving a rim of two hairs completely surrounding the bald spot to make any spreading visible."

Michah's face dropped with the thought of having to endure another seven days locked away in his house. He would be cut off from the world he loved to be a part of.

"After the second confinement period of seven days," the kohen continued, "both those with patches on the skin as well as those with bald patches are re-evaluated once more. If the criteria for tzara'as have still not been met, then the person is declared pure. All they have to do is wash their body and garments. Having been confined, they are considered to have been impure, in some sense."

Michah considered all that he heard. "That's a lot of details," he said to the kohen.

"More than you know and have discussed," he told Michah. "Tzara'as is serious business, because loшон hara is serious business."

Michah thought about his friend, Osniel's warning, and how he had downplayed it. Now he was paying the price. "What was I thinking?" he asked himself. "Why did I take the risk?"

"My work here is done," the kohen said. He gave Michah a few final instructions before leaving.

"Thank you for coming by," he said, contrite. "I promise I will try and control what I say for now on!"

The kohen smiled, and said. "That's good. But it's not me you have to make that promise to. It's God, and yourself."

"I suppose," he said.

The kohen left, and Michah closed the door on the world he would not be a part of for seven days. Would he ever live down the embarrassment? To take a step in the right direction, he took out a scroll of Tehillim his grandfather had left him, and began reciting. He prayed to God to help him in the future, every now and then looking at the blotch on his arm to see if it was gone to spare him any additional pain, and be the cause of more. ©2019 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

