

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

It is hard to trace with any precision the moment when a new idea makes its first appearance on the human scene, especially one as amorphous as that of love. But love has a history.<sup>1</sup> There is the contrast we find in Greek, and then Christian thought between eros and agape: sexual desire and a highly abstract love for humanity in general.

There is the concept of chivalry that makes its appearance in the age of the Crusades, the code of conduct that prized gallantry and feats of bravery to “win the heart of a lady.” There is the romantic love that makes its appearance in the novels of Jane Austen, hedged with the proviso that the young or not-so-young man destined for the heroine must have the right income and country estate, so as to exemplify the “truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”<sup>2</sup> And there is the moment in Fiddler on the Roof where, exposed by their children to the new ideas in pre-revolutionary Russia, Tevye turns to his wife Golde, and the following conversation ensues:

Tevye: Do you love me?

Golde: I’m your wife!

Tevye: I know! But do you love me?

Golde: Do I love him? For twenty-five years I’ve lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years, my bed is his...

Tevye: Shh!

Golde: If that’s not love, what is?

Tevye: Then you love me!

Golde: I suppose I do!

The inner history of humanity is in part the history of the idea of love. And at some stage a new idea makes its appearance in biblical Israel. We can trace it best in a highly suggestive passage in the book of one of the great prophets of the Bible, Hosea.

Hosea lived in the eighth century BCE. The kingdom had been divided since the death of Solomon. The northern kingdom in particular, where Hosea lived, had lapsed after a period of peace and prosperity into

lawlessness, idolatry and chaos. Between 747 and 732 BCE there were no less than five kings, the result of a series of intrigues and bloody struggles for power. The people, too, had become lax: “There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of G-d in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder” (Hos. 4: 1-2).

Like other prophets, Hosea knew that Israel’s destiny depended on its sense of mission. Faithful to G-d, it was able to do extraordinary things: survive in the face of empires, and generate a society unique in the ancient world, of the equal dignity of all as fellow citizens under the sovereignty of the Creator of heaven and earth. Faithless, however, it was just one more minor power in the ancient Near East, whose chances of survival against larger political predators were minimal.

What makes the book of Hosea remarkable is the episode with which it begins. G-d tells the prophet to marry a prostitute, and see what it feels like to have a love betrayed. Only then will Hosea have a glimpse into G-d’s sense of betrayal by the people of Israel. Having liberated them from slavery and brought them into their land, G-d saw them forget the past, forsake the covenant, and worship strange gods. Yet He cannot abandon them despite the fact that they have abandoned Him. It is a powerful passage, conveying the astonishing assertion that more than the Jewish people love G-d, G-d loves the Jewish people. The history of Israel is a love story between the faithful G-d and his often faithless people. Though G-d is sometimes angry, He cannot but forgive. He will take them on a kind of second honeymoon, and they will renew their marriage vows:

“Therefore I am now going to allure her;

I will lead her into the desert

and speak tenderly to her . . .

I will betroth you to me forever;

I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion.

I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will know the Lord.” (Hosea 2: 16-22)

It is this last sentence – with its explicit comparison between the covenant and a marriage – that Jewish men say when they put on the hand-tefillin, winding its strap around the finger like a wedding-ring.

One verse in the midst of this prophecy

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960. Simon May, *Love: A History*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The famous first line of *Pride and Prejudice*.

deserves the closest scrutiny. It contains two complex metaphors that must be unraveled strand by strand:

“In that day,” declares the Lord,  
 “you will call Me ‘my husband’ [ish];  
 you will no longer call Me ‘my master’ [baali].  
 (Hosea 2: 18)

This is a double pun. Baal, in biblical Hebrew, meant ‘a husband’, but in a highly specific sense – namely, ‘master, owner, possessor, controller.’ It signalled physical, legal and economic dominance. It was also the name of the Canaanite god – whose prophets Elijah challenged in the famous confrontation at Mount Carmel. Baal (often portrayed as a bull) was the god of the storm, who defeated Mot, the god of sterility and death. Baal was the rain that impregnated the earth and made it fertile. The religion of Baal is the worship of god-as-power.

Hosea contrasts this kind of relationship with the other Hebrew word for husband, ish. Here he is recalling the words of the first man to the first woman:

“This is now bone of my bones  
 And flesh of my flesh;  
 She shall be called Woman [ishah],  
 Because she was taken from Man [ish].” (Gen.  
 2: 23)

Here the male-female relationship is predicated on something quite other than power and dominance, ownership and control. Man and woman confront one another in sameness and difference. Each is an image of the other, yet each is separate and distinct. The only relationship able to bind them together without the use of force is marriage-as-covenant – a bond of mutual loyalty and love in which each makes a pledge to the other to serve one another.

Not only is this a radical way of reconceptualizing the relationship between man and woman. It is also, implies Hosea, the way we should think of the relationship between human beings and G-d. G-d reaches out to humanity not as power – the storm, the thunder, the rain – but as love, and not an abstract, philosophical love but a deep and abiding passion that survives all the disappointments and betrayals. Israel may not always behave lovingly toward G-d, says Hosea, but G-d loves Israel and will never cease to do so.

How we relate to G-d affects how we relate to other people. That is Hosea’s message – and vice versa: how we relate to other people affects the way we think of G-d. Israel’s political chaos in the eighth century BCE was intimately connected to its religious waywardness. A society built on corruption and exploitation is one where might prevails over right. That is not Judaism but idolatry, Baal-worship.

Now we understand why the sign of the covenant is circumcision, the commandment given in the first of this week’s parshiot, Tazria. For faith to be more than the worship of power, it must affect the most

intimate relationship between men and women. In a society founded on covenant, male-female relationships are built on something other and gentler than male dominance, masculine power, sexual desire and the drive to own, control and possess. Baal must become ish. The alpha male must become the caring husband. Sex must be sanctified and tempered by mutual respect. The sexual drive must be circumcised and circumscribed so that it no longer seeks to possess and is instead content to love.

There is thus more than an accidental connection between monotheism and monogamy. Although biblical law does not command monogamy, it nonetheless depicts it as the normative state from the start of the human story: Adam and Eve, one man, one woman. Whenever in Genesis a patriarch marries more than one woman there is tension and anguish. The commitment to one G-d is mirrored in the commitment to one person.

The Hebrew word emunah, often translated as “faith,” in fact means faithfulness, fidelity, precisely the commitment one undertakes in making a marriage. Conversely, for the prophets there is a connection between idolatry and adultery. That is how G-d describes Israel to Hosea. G-d married the Israelites but they, in serving idols, acted the part of a promiscuous woman (Hos. 1-2).

The love of husband and wife – a love at once personal and moral, passionate and responsible – is as close as we come to understanding G-d’s love for us and our ideal love for Him. When Hosea says, “You will know the Lord,” he does not mean knowledge in an abstract sense. He means the knowledge of intimacy and relationship, the touch of two selves across the metaphysical abyss that separates one consciousness from another. That is the theme of The Song of Songs, that deeply human yet deeply mystical expression of eros, the love between humanity and G-d. It is also the meaning of one of the definitive sentences in Judaism: “You shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5).

Judaism from the beginning made a connection between sexuality and violence on the one hand, marital faithfulness and social order on the other. Not by chance is marriage called kiddushin, “sanctification.” Like covenant itself, marriage is a pledge of loyalty between two parties, each recognizing the other’s integrity, honouring their differences even as they come together to bring new life into being. Marriage is to society what covenant is to religious faith: a decision to make love – not power, wealth or force majeure – the generative principle of life.

Just as spirituality is the most intimate relationship between us and G-d, so sex is the most intimate relationship between us and another person. Circumcision is the eternal sign of Jewish faith because

it unites the life of the soul with the passions of the body, reminding us that both must be governed by humility, self-restraint and love.

Brit milah helps transform the male from Baal to Ish, from dominant partner to loving husband, just as G-d tells Hosea that this is what He seeks in His relationship with the people of the covenant. Circumcision turns biology into spirituality. The instinctive male urge to reproduce becomes instead a covenantal act of partnership and mutual affirmation. It was thus as decisive a turn in human civilisation as Abrahamic monotheism itself. Both are about abandoning power as the basis of relationship, and instead aligning ourselves with what Dante called “the love that moves the sun and other stars.”<sup>3</sup> Circumcision is the physical expression of the faith that lives in love. *Covenant and Conversation 5775 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z”l ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z”l and rabbisacks.org*

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**T**he 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 placed right in 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 God 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 God 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 God, 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 reveal 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.

<sup>3</sup> The Divine Comedy, 33: 143-45.

God'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 tahara goes 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. God 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 God'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. ©2022 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

In this week's Torah reading, we are informed, almost in passing, of the commandment regarding circumcision of male children at the age of eight days. This commandment, which has existed forever in Jewish life, is the symbol of the covenant with our father Abraham between the Lord of Israel and the people of Israel and is one of the core rituals of Judaism.

The circumcision ceremony itself is called a brit -- a covenant. It is the dedication of Jews to their faith and tradition that has remained, despite all the various attempts to destroy it in each century of Jewish existence. Throughout Jewish history, this ritual of circumcision, like the Jewish people itself, has always been under attack and criticism from the outside world.

The Romans and the Greeks, who worshiped the human body in its physical form and for its prowess, abhorred the idea of circumcision. They felt that it was a mutilation that defiled the body and its perfection. Jews, however, felt that circumcision sanctified the body, and represented the better nature of human

beings -- the spiritual and eternal side of human life.

Jews always believed that inevitably the body weakens, withers, and eventually disappears, and it is only the intangible parts of our existence -- memory, spirit, and creativity, that endure and can be passed on from generation to generation. As such, circumcision was not so much a defilement of the human body, as it was and is a testimony to the enhancement and eternity of the human spirit. Every circumcision was a statement of renewal of the original covenant with our father Abraham, and is a testimony to the values of monotheism, human kindness, and hospitality that he represented and introduced into a pagan and hostile world environment.

Even today, there are many forces in the world that seek to deny the rights of the Jewish people to perform this core basic commandment. These groups always cloak themselves in the piety of self-righteousness. They claim to represent the eight-day-old infant, who apparently has no say in the matter. Mixed into this specious argument is the old Roman and Greek idea of the holiness of the human body and the necessity to protect it from mutilation, which still exists.

There are so-called democratic countries that even have legislated against circumcision, all in the name of some higher good and greater morality, that only they possess and understand.

It must be noted that in the Moslem world, also claiming the heritage from our father Abraham, circumcision is also an enshrined ritual and one of its tenets of faith, but it is usually performed only when the child is much older than eight days. One of the decrees against Judaism instituted by the tyrannical Soviet Union government of the past century was the banning of circumcision. Yet, when the Soviet Union collapsed, an enormous number of Jews who were already adults, chose to undergo circumcision, to show their solidarity with their people and with the tradition of our fathers.

This phenomenon attests to the strength and permanence of this commandment amongst all Jews, no matter what their status of religious observance may be. It is this supreme act of loyalty and commitment that binds the Jewish people together with each other, and with our past, our present and our eternity. ©2022 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**

While the Book of Genesis records God telling Abraham to circumcise his son (17:9-14), circumcision is once again mandated in the Book of Leviticus (12:3). According to the Sifra on this verse, here we are told additional laws: that

circumcision must be performed during the day and even on Shabbat.

What is fascinating, too, is that these laws are “tucked into” the passages that discuss the status of a mother after childbirth. In the words of the Torah: “When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male...as in the days of her menstruation [niddah]...titmah [commonly translated “shall she be impure”]. And in the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised” (12:2, 3).

The mention of circumcision with menstruation is also found in the original command to Abraham. Precisely at that time, God also reveals that a child will be born to Sarah, Abraham’s wife. When Sarah hears the news, she laughs. The Torah explains her laughter by pointing out that Sarah had aged and 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). In fact, the Talmud records that Sarah miraculously then began to menstruate once more (Rosh Hashanah 11a).

Note, too, the sentence from Ezekiel recited at every circumcision: “And I saw you wallowing in your bloods” (Ezekiel 16:6). A Midrash preserved in Sefer Nitzachon Yashan understands these words to relate to God passing over Jewish homes as Israel leaves Egypt. “Bloods” is in the plural, as this blood contained a mixture of the blood of the paschal lamb and the bloods of circumcision mixed with menstrual blood placed on the doorpost and lintel.

Perhaps the laws of niddah, of family purity, are the counterpoint to circumcision, as they are paired together in the two key times circumcision is mandated in the Torah? These rituals may overlap conceptually as both symbolize the importance of sanctifying sexuality.

Indeed, the terms milah (circumcision) and niddah have similar meanings. Milah, according to Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch, comes from the word mul, meaning “opposite.” Niddah has a comparable meaning: “separate.” Contrary to many social mores, milah and niddah attempt to sanctify life, even in the most powerful and intimate realms. ©2022 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

## 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 (karban 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 tovo—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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

### Migdal Ohr

**"T**he Kohain shall see the blemish in the flesh... and the Kohain shall see him and declare him impure.” (Vayikra 13:3) All the laws of tzaraas are given over to the Kohanim for implementation and “enforcement.” Though Hashem gave Moshe the details of what blemishes or lesions should be considered tzaraas, and how the changes they undergo affect the person’s status, it was up to the individual Kohain to inspect and render decisions on them.

In this posuk, we find something unusual. It says that the Kohain will see the blemish in the flesh, gives a few details, and then says, “...and the Kohain shall look at him and declare him impure.” Why the double vision?

The Meshech Chochma explains that this is a reference to two things the Kohain takes into account.

First, there is the matter of the nega itself. It must meet certain criteria to be pure or not. Then, there is another thing to consider. The Kohain then looks at the overall person. Chazal tell us that there are certain times the Kohain does not go to look at blemishes. For example, if the man has just gotten married and this will disturb his Sheva Brachos, or if it is a festival, and an impure ruling would prevent him from Simchas Yom Tov, the Kohain does not look at it now. The strict ruling on the lesion is tempered by the mitzva to be b'simcha.

This means we have a certain latitude within the Torah to view things with different perspectives, and to take into account mitigating factors. The Meshech Chochma does point out that the Torah here alludes to judging the blemish itself or judging the times, but does not give the Kohain the right to say, "This fellow needs social interaction, I will not render him impure." The Torah's laws are for a purpose, and are not to be done away with because of purely emotional reasons.

The underlying message, though, is that things can be viewed in multiple ways, and we should all recognize that we have the power to see them differently. That doesn't mean the facts change; only our perception of them – and our perception is very powerful. In fact, if the Kohain sees a blemish and unwittingly declares it pure incorrectly, it is pure!

This week we read Parshas HaChodesh, when the mitzvah of sanctifying the New Moon was given to the Jewish People. At the beginning of a month, when the moon was visible and would start waxing, witnesses who saw it would come to Jerusalem and testify to what they saw. Based on that, the Bais Din would declare Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the new month, impacting when the Festivals and holy days would fall out.

Hashem gave us the power to sanctify the mundane days of the week. We declare when something is holy, and when it is not. How? By utilizing our ability to see even the smallest bit of light from the moon and know that this light will continue to grow. Similarly, we ought to use our positive vision when looking at others and seek to find the goodness within them. Doing so will foster their growth, and enable them to add sanctity to the world.

*In a small town in Europe, someone frantically came to the Rabbi's home one Shabbos, telling him that a Jewish man had opened his store on Shabbos! The Rabbi took his young son with him and hurried to the store. Sure enough, it was open. He sent the child to ask the man to meet him upstairs, in the storeowner's apartment. The man came up, trembling in fear of what the Rabbi would say. He sat down at the table facing the Rabbi, who dissolved in a fit of tears.*

*Instead of crying about the sanctity of Shabbos, the Rabbi said, "What kind of leader am I? That one of my congregants should be so desperate for parnasa he feels he must open his store on Shabbos?! How could I*

*have been so blind?!" The man replied, "It's true! I had no choice. We're in such dire straits."*

*The Rabbi explained that we get no bracha or benefit from work done on Shabbos and the man agreed to close the store - because the Rabbi had seen the best in him. – As heard from R' Ephraim Wachsmann © 2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

#### **RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## **Birth and Circumcision**

**C**ircumcision is mentioned several times in the Torah. Avraham was commanded to circumcise himself at the age of ninety-nine, Yishmael, who was thirteen at the same time, and his slaves one year before the birth of Yitzchak. Avraham was also commanded to circumcise Yitzchak and all future Jewish male children on the eighth day of his birth. In the story of Dinah and Shechem, Ya'akov's sons insisted that Shechem would not be allowed to marry Dinah unless all the males of the city became circumcised. When Moshe was reentering Egypt with his family, he became deathly ill until Tziporah circumcised his son, which he had neglected to do. When Hashem through Moshe commanded the Jews about the Korban Pesach, He included that no uncircumcised male could participate in this mitzvah. Here in our parasha also, in a brief reference in the commandments involving the bleeding after the birth of a male child and the times of impurity and purity of that bleeding, one sentence is devoted to circumcision.

The Torah commands, "When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be impure for a seven-day period, as during the days of her menstruant infirmity shall she be impure. On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. For thirty-three days she shall stay in blood of purity; she may not touch anything sacred and she may not enter the Sanctuary, until the completion of her days of purity." Since the first sentence and the last sentence involve her purity and impurity, our Rabbis find it unusual that the Torah should interject this mitzvah which involves the child and not the mother's status of purity.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch has described circumcision as "the free-willed moral subordination of our physical bodily sensuality under the laws of Hashem." Hirsch explains that circumcision is only mentioned here "to teach its intimate connection with the preceding impurity which stems from giving birth." Hirsch speaks of the need for seven days of spiritual impurity of the mother as "the completion required for the passing away of a condition of depression which has to be overcome; and, more in detail, as the passing out of the passively created unfree existence (the symbolism of the number six) into the human free-willed existence to be won in a bond with Hashem, (the number seven). Then the eighth day

after birth as being the godly free nature of all human beings at birth, building itself up for the higher and fuller calling of the specifically Jewish mission, as being a repetition of the first day on a higher scale, and considered as the Jewish octave of the first day of physical birth."

The Mei'am Lo'eiz quotes the Midrash Tanchuma. "Turnus Rufus the wicked once asked R. Akiva: 'Whose works are better, the Holy One Blessed is He or those of flesh and blood?' He answered him, 'those of flesh and blood are better.' Turnus Rufus said to him: 'But look at the heavens and earth, can man make anything like them?' R. Akiva replied, 'Don't bring me an argument from something way above human creatures over which they have no control, but bring me an argument from those within human range.' He said to him, 'Why do you circumcise?' He answered. 'I knew you would ask me about this and that is why I anticipated you and told you that human works are better than those of the Holy One Blessed is He. R. Akiva brought ears of corn and cakes. He said to him, 'The former are the works of Hashem, the latter of man. Are not these better than ears of corn?' Turnus Rufus said to him, 'If He desires circumcision, why does not the child leave the mother's womb circumcised?' R. Akiva replied, 'Why does his umbilical cord go out with him and he is suspended by his navel and his mother cuts it? Regarding your query why he is not born circumcised, this is because the Holy One Blessed is He has given the commandments for the sole purpose of refining our character through them."

Rashi explains that this discussion of Man follows the laws of the kosher animals, as Man was the final act of Creation. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that there were really two Creations as the first Creation was contingent on the receiving of the Torah. Therefore, the real Creation began with the acceptance of the Torah by the B'nei Yisrael.

HaRav Sorotzkin returns to the question of the inclusion of this sentence concerning circumcision within the laws of pure and impure. He explains that this inclusion is also unusual because we have already learned the law of circumcision on the eighth day from Hashem's command to Avraham concerning his son, Yitzchak. HaRav Sorotzkin questions whether circumcision is discussed here to link Man to the Kosher animals by giving Man two signs like we see by kosher animals and fish. First, we have the mother counting seven days and then going to the mikvah followed by the second sign of the circumcision. With these two signs, the B'nei Yisrael are recognized as worthy of being part of "a nation of priests and a Holy People." HaRav Sorotzkin ties the mikvah to the circumcision and in this way demonstrates why a convert must go to the mikvah and be circumcised in order to be part of this "nation of priests and a Holy People."

One problem still needs to be solved: how does a daughter gain this closeness to Hashem and become a part of "a nation of priests and a Holy People?" Perhaps this can be answered by the text of the Torah: "If she gives birth to a female, she shall be impure for two weeks, as during her menstruation period; and for sixty-six days she shall stay in blood of purity." HaRav Sorotzkin and others explain that Man was created from the ground and received his blood when Hashem breathed into him a soul. Woman was created with one source of blood from Man (his rib) and the other source of blood from receiving her soul from Hashem. This double source of blood is recognized here by doubling the mother's impure blood-time and pure blood-time after birthing a daughter. This extension enables the daughter to have "two" signs, and it raises her to an equal level of spiritual purity to a son.

We find in many places in the Torah that blood is treated with respect because it is the place of the soul. The blood of a sacrifice is gathered in a holy vessel and then sprinkled onto the altar and sometimes onto the curtains of the Mishkan. Any blood from slaughtering an animal or bird is covered on the ground. The blood from the birthing process and the blood of the circumcision are the signs that enable a human to become part of the Holy People. Blood is the life-source, the sustainer of life. But blood is more than that. Blood can only sustain life, it cannot direct it. It is our use of the blood of the sacrifices and of the respect for blood which we demonstrate through menstrual blood and birthing blood which brings us closer to Hashem through His commandments. May we recognize and achieve this closeness. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND**

### **RavFrand**

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**T**zora'as -- which is one of the primary topics of this week's parsha -- is a consequence of a variety of sins, such as Lashon HaRah (gossip), Tzarus Ayin (miserliness), and Gayvah (arrogance). But for whatever reason, when a person has become a Metzora -- "his clothes must be torn, he must let the hair of his head grow long, he shall cloak himself up to his lips; and he is to call out: 'Contaminated, contaminated!'" (Vayikra 13:45). There are many parallels here to the halacha of mourning. A person who is a Metzora goes into a form of Aveilus, similar to an Avel.

The next pasuk continues: "All the days that the affliction is upon him, he shall remain contaminated; he is contaminated. He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp." (Vayikra 13:46). Beyond everything else, the Metzora is placed into solitary confinement -- outside the camp -- until his Tzora'as is



cured.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky, in his sefer *Emes L'Yaakov*, wonders why isolation is an appropriate punishment for a Metzora. Rav Yaakov suggests that perhaps solitary confinement does not seem appropriate for a Metzora. The halacha is (even though this is Biblically prohibited to do) that if a Metzora rips off his signs of Tzora'as, he is no longer Tameh. This means that if a Kohen will examine him again and there is no more Tzora'as, he will be proclaimed Tahor. So perhaps if we put this fellow in confinement, we should maintain some kind of surveillance such as a video camera to ensure that he does not surreptitiously peel off his Tzora'as and try to be m'Taher himself! Why do we leave him out there in the middle of nowhere where he can do anything he wants?

Rav Yaakov rejects the possibility that he is placed in confinement because he has a contagious condition that we are concerned might spread to others. He insists that Tzora'as is not contagious. It is a spiritual disease, not a physical disease that we might consider as contagious.

Ironically, I found that the Meshech Chochma in *Parshas Tazria* in fact says that Tzora'as is a communicable disease. He brings several proofs from the Talmud and the Medrash that this is the case. The Meshech Chochma points out that this is why it was the Kohanim who had to deal with the Metzora -- because the Kohanim were on a higher spiritual level and had elevated merit, which would hopefully grant them added protection from such contamination.

Be that as it may, Rav Yaakov says that Tzora'as is not a communicable disease, which leads him to the problem: Why was the Metzora put into solitary confinement? Rav Yaakov explains that the purpose of this confinement is that we want to send the Metzora a message from Heaven that based on his behavior, he should be incommunicado. The Ribono shel Olam is not happy with him. He is in a form of excommunication -- the Ribono shel Olam does not want him around. By putting him in solitary confinement in this world, we are actualizing what is happening in Heaven. The hope and intent are that his isolation and confinement should bring him to Teshuva. Sitting in solitary confinement should help him recognize why he is in this type of situation.

I was thinking that perhaps there is another approach which might explain why the Metzora must be placed in confinement "outside the camp." A person who is a Metzora, who has engaged in Lashon HoRah is a menace to society. His presence harms the community. We always think of a "danger to society" as someone who attacks or harms other people. But a Metzora is just as much a menace to society. He destroys society because when people speak ill of one another and spread rumor -- whether true or not true --

about other people, it destroys the fabric of interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, his punishment is "You cannot be in society." I heard an interesting chiddush in the name of Rav Yaakov Galinsky. If we consider the Ten Plagues, we may ask ourselves, "Which was the worst of the Makos?" A case could be made that Makas Bechoros was the worst of the plagues. But what was the most difficult plague to withstand -- not in terms of the numbers who were killed or the damage, but simply the most difficult maka to endure?

Rav Yaakov Galinsky says the most difficult maka was the Plague of Darkness. The reason for that, he maintains, is that it says by Makas Choshech that "One man could not see his brother" (Shemos 10:23). This means that it was impossible to commiserate with someone else. By all the other makos, everyone suffered together. Everyone experienced Blood. Everyone experienced Lice. Everybody experienced Wild Animals.

Everyone complains about their problems. There was a city-wide blackout a couple of years ago due to a major storm. Everyone complained how tough they had it. I lost my freezer, I lost this, I lost that. Everyone commiserates with each other. When there is a blizzard... "Oy! It was gefairlich! I had so much snow on my drive way, I could not move my car for two weeks!" But at least you could talk to people about it, and everyone could share their personal problems. "You think that was bad? You should have seen what happened by me!"

Misery loves company. By every other plague, as bad as it was, at least there was company. However, during the plague of Darkness, people sat alone for three days and could not talk to anyone! It was impossible to tell anyone how bad it was! Nobody could tell you that he had it worse than you! "One man did not see his brother." They all had to sit alone by themselves! To deal with a maka and not be able to share it with anyone is the most difficult maka to take.

This is what we do to the Metzora. We tell the person "You are a menace to society. You do not belong among people. You cannot have the comfort of being with other people to console you and commiserate with and comfort you. That is your punishment."

We deny the Metzora, who is a menace to society, the benefit of society -- which is to have someone else there to comfort him. ©2022 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

