

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

It was the Septuagint, the early Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, that translated tsara'at, the condition whose identification and cleansing occupies much of Tazria and Metzora as "lepra", giving rise to a long tradition identifying it with leprosy.

That tradition is now widely acknowledged to be incorrect. First, the condition described in the Torah simply does not fit the symptoms of leprosy. Second, the Torah applies it not only to various skin conditions but also to mildew on clothes and the walls of houses, which certainly rules out any known disease. The Rambam puts it best: "Tsara'at is a comprehensive term covering a number of dissimilar conditions. Thus whiteness in a person's skin is called tsara'at. The falling off of some of his hair on the head or the chin is called tsara'at. A change of colour in garments or in houses is called tsara'at." (Hilchot Tumat Tsara'at 16:10)

Seeking to identify the nature of the phenomenon, the Sages sought for clues elsewhere in the Torah and found them readily available. Miriam was smitten by tsara'at for speaking badly about her brother Moses (Num. 12:10). The Torah later gives special emphasis to this event, seeing in it a warning for all generations: "Be careful with regard to the plague of tsara'at... Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam along the way after you came out of Egypt." (Deut. 24:8-9)

It was, in other words, no normal phenomenon but a specific Divine punishment for lashon hara, evil speech. The Rabbis drew attention to the verbal similarity between metzora, a person afflicted by the condition, and motzi shem ra, someone guilty of slander.

Rambam, on the basis of rabbinic traditions, gives a brilliant account of why tsara'at afflicted both inanimate objects like walls and clothes, and human beings: "It [tsara'at] was a sign and wonder among the Israelites to warn them against slanderous speaking. For if a man uttered slander, the walls of his house would suffer a change. If he repented, the house would again become clean. But if he continued in his wickedness until the house was torn down, leather objects in his house on which he sat or lay would suffer a change. If he repented they would again become clean. But if he continued in his wickedness until they were burned, the garments which he wore would suffer a change. If he repented they

would again become clean. But if he continued in his wickedness until they were burned, his skin would suffer a change and he would become infected by tsara'at and be set apart and alone until he no more engaged in the conversation of the wicked which is scoffing and slander." (Hilchot Tumat Tsara'at 16:10)

The most compelling illustration of what the tradition is speaking about when it talks of the gravity of motsi shem ra, slander, and lashon hara, evil speech, is Shakespeare's tragedy Othello. Iago, a high-ranking soldier, is bitterly resentful of Othello, a Moorish general in the army of Venice. Othello has promoted a younger man, Cassio, over the more experienced Iago, who is determined to take revenge. He does so in a prolonged and vicious campaign, which involves among other things tricking Othello into the suspicion that his wife, Desdemona, is having an adulterous affair with Cassio. Othello asks Iago to kill Cassio, and he himself kills Desdemona, smothering her in her bed. Emilia, Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant, discovers her mistress dead and as Othello explains why he has killed her, realises the nature of her husband's plot and exposes it. Othello, in guilt and grief, commits suicide, while Iago is arrested and taken to be tortured and possibly executed.

It is a play entirely about the evil of slander and suspicion, and portrays literally what the Sages said figuratively: "Evil speech kills three people: the one who says it, the one who listens to it, and the one about whom it is said." (Arachin 15b)

Shakespeare's tragedy makes it painfully clear how much evil speech lives in the dark corners of suspicion. Had the others known what Iago was saying to stir up fear and distrust, the facts might have become known and the tragedy averted. As it was, he was able to mislead the various characters, playing on their emotional weaknesses, distrust and envy, getting each to believe the worst about one another. It ends in serial bloodshed and disaster.

Hence the poetic justice Jewish tradition attributes to one of the least poetic of biblical passages, the laws relating to skin diseases and mildew. The slanderer spreads his lies in private, but his evil is exposed in public. First the walls of his house proclaim his sin, then the leather objects on which he sits, then his clothes, and eventually his skin itself. He is condemned to the humiliation of isolation: "'Unclean! Unclean!' he must call out... Since he is unclean, he must remain alone, and his place shall be outside the camp." (Lev.

13:45-46)

Said the Rabbis: Because his words separated husband from wife and brother from brother, his punishment is that he is separated from human contact and made an outcast from society (Arachin 16b).

At its highest, WikiLeaks aims at being today's functional equivalent of the law of the metzora: an attempt to make public the discreditable things people do and say in private. The Sages said about evil speech that it was as bad as idolatry, incest, and murder combined, and it was Shakespeare's genius to show us one dramatic way in which it can contaminate human relationships, turning people against one another with tragic consequences.

Never say or do in private what you would be ashamed to read about on the front page of tomorrow's newspapers. That is the basic theme of the law of tsara'at, updated to today. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l © 2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Torah Lights

“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. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2024 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the primary commandments in Judaism is to marry and have children. In the Garden of Eden, we find Adam and Chava blessed by God and told to procreate and fill the world with people. For the Jewish people, having children has become a demographic necessity. Even though it is years since World II and the resultant Holocaust, the Jewish people has not as of yet made good on those immense losses in terms of population.

This is due to a lower-than-average birth rate amongst nonobservant Jews, a high rate of divorce, later-in-life marriages and an increasing population of singles. The ravages of assimilation and intermarriage also play a great part in the fact that Jews can hardly replace themselves, let alone make up for the deficit caused by the Holocaust.

The Torah places a high priority on children. It sees in children not only the physical continuity of the Jewish people but also a spiritual and heavenly connection that transcends one's life span. The rabbis commented regarding our father Jacob that as long as his descendants were alive and functioning then Jacob himself, so to speak, was also still alive. Seeing oneself 'past the grave,' is one of the hallmarks of Judaism and of the Jewish people. The concept of the immortal soul is reinforced by being able to project forward in time, living vicariously in the lives of one's descendants.

But, my friends, we all know that having and raising children is no easy task. And we also know that a parent remains a parent for one's entire life. I feel that this is one of the subtle messages conveyed at the

beginning of this week's Torah reading. The Torah speaks of impurity, sacrifice, and isolation of the mother after the birth of a child. This is the Torah's indication that these are factors that are unavoidable in the raising and nurturing of a child. In all human society it is natural, indeed expected, for parents to do everything possible to give their children a good and healthy life. Those parents who do not somehow have that instinct within them are shunned in society and even liable to criminal punishment for neglect or abuse of their children. They are, even in our most open and liberal society, treated as being aberrant and cruel. The Torah, which is the book of practical human life, minces no words in describing the difficulties – impurity, sacrifice, and separation from others – that having and raising children automatically brings to parents.

It is perhaps for this very reason that the Torah gave women such a strong maternal instinct and the desire to have children. For without that instinct, based only on the practicalities of life and the difficulties of raising children, Jewish demographics would, in a practical sense, offer us no hope whatsoever for the future. The rabbis in Avot correctly stated that "the reward is directly commensurate with the effort and sacrifice." That is certainly true as far as children and generations and the Jewish future is concerned. © 2024 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

The Torah explicates how the high priest undertakes the task of declaring someone a metzora (a person afflicted with a rare skin disease): "And the priest shall look on the plague in the skin of the flesh...it is the plague of tzara'at; and the priest will look on him – the metzora – [v'ra'ahu hakohen] and pronounce him impure [tamei]" (Leviticus 13:3).

Once the priest examines the tzara'at and recognizes "the plague," why the necessity to "look at the metzora" before rendering judgment? Perhaps this additional step teaches important lessons about how Jewish law operates. After all, what is the halachah to which we are committed? Is it a rigid system of law similar to mathematics or physics that does not consider the questioner and his or her problem?

Or is the halachah a living, broad-based structure, allowing the decisor to consider the individual and the specific circumstances?

While objective knowledge of Jewish law is a prerequisite, understanding the human condition is also critical. In the end, halachah is not a narrow path. Rather, it operates within broader parameters. Parameters are necessary, as what falls outside them is unacceptable. But the borders are wide enough to allow for significant

latitude to account for the situation and conditions.

Responsa after responsa point to this balance. They tell of rabbis who declare a chicken unkosher for one individual and another chicken, posed with the identical inquiry, kosher for another. How is this possible? Our tradition recognizes the reality of "in between" cases: For the rich, the stringent view was followed and the chicken was unkosher as funds were available to buy another. For the poor, the rabbi understood the individual's need and followed the lenient view.

In the 1970s, the chief rabbi of the Israeli army, Rabbi Mordechai Piron, spent Shabbat at our home in Riverdale. Through tears, he told me how the rabbinate had solved the last agunah (chained woman) problem from the 1973 Yom Kippur War, declaring enough evidence to identify all missing soldiers as dead so their wives could remarry. Each case required careful study of the law. But the cries of the widows seeking relief were also heard.

So too the metzora. After the priest objectively assesses the condition, he must look into the eyes of the metzora before declaring him tamei. Looking means assessing the circumstances. If the metzora was the lone breadwinner and casting him out of the camp – as is done to the metzora – would render his family destitute, perhaps there would be room for a more lenient view. This doesn't mean that the decisor can always find a solution; sometimes the answer is no. Still, within the guidelines of halachah, maybe relief can be found.

Not coincidentally, the Torah is called Etz Chayim (a Tree of Life). It could have been called Etz Hada'at (a Tree of Knowledge). But that would not be enough. Knowledge alone is insufficient. In the end, decisors must not only know the book, but life – understanding people and circumstances.

V'ra'ahu hakohen. ©2024 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

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) 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 AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Tum'ah, or "ritual defilement," is invisible but consequential in many contexts, especially, though not exclusively, with regard to kodoshim, material holding holy status.

And, in most cases of tum'ah impartation, the defilement happens as a matter of course, through contact of one sort or another with a source of tum'ah.

Tzara'as, the skin condition that occupies the bulk of parshas Tazria, is different. It is wholly dependent on the judgment, based on the detailed laws in the parsha, of a kohein. And not just his judgment but his pronouncement of "tamei."

Hence, we have the law that a groom with a sign of tzara'as is to be given seven days of wedding celebration before presenting his condition to a kohein; and anyone with such a sign does not bring it to a kohein during a holiday (Rashi Vayikra 13:14, based on Moed Katan 7b). No pronouncement of tum'ah, no tum'ah.

At least in the case of skin tzara'as, which, it is taught, results from lashon hara, speaking ill of others, the oddity of the tuma'ah being dependent on a

pronouncement might telegraph a subtle message to the afflicted person: Speech is powerful. It can be destructive, as in lashon hara, the source of tzara'as. And withholding it can be consequential in a positive way, preventing tum'ah from manifesting. It is what sets humanity apart from the animal world.

It's fitting, in other words, that the status of a condition brought about by speech is dependent on speech. ©2024 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd when the days of her purity are complete...she shall bring a yearling lamb as an olah and a young dove or turtledove as a chatas..." (Vayikra 12:6) After giving birth, a woman had a period of time that she remained pure. It was 40 days after having a son, or 80 days after having a daughter. The commentaries explain this has to do with the amount of time it takes for the different genders to form in the womb, and some also suggest the timeframe for the boy was modified to enable her to attend the bris in a state of purity. At the end of this time, she brought a set of sacrifices. The fear was that due to the stress of the birth, she may have thought or said something she should not have, including potential vows made under duress. She therefore brings two sacrifices.

The lamb is brought as an Olah. Completely burned on the altar, an Olah atones for improper thoughts, even though it did not result in actions being taken. The Chatas atones for actions, and this is brought for something she may have said or done.

We may wonder, though, why the woman brings the lamb for thoughts and the bird for actions. Certainly, actions are worse than thoughts alone, so the actions should require the larger lamb, while the thoughts should only require the bird.

Not only that, but if the woman can't afford it, she IS allowed to bring two birds, so we see that a bird is enough to atone for thoughts. Why, then, does the Torah require her to bring a lamb if she can afford it?

The answer is that Hashem's commandments are perfect, intended to provide each of us with what we need. The fact that we could even ask these questions is actually the answer to them. As the Navi says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways My ways."

We suggested that actions need more atonement than thoughts. Obviously, Hashem doesn't think so. Thoughts are much freer than actions and a person can dream up things they can't actually do, resulting in numerous sins of fantasy. The woman giving birth could have given in to the stress and begun a flurry of anxious and angry thoughts that had no basis in reality. For this, a serious korban must be brought.

For the actual potential of saying something she should not have, bringing a bird is enough. When a person does something concrete, they are more aware

of it and more likely to regret it. If they "merely" think it, they don't feel any harm was done.

Ah, you say, but when she can't afford it, a bird is sufficient. Why is that? It is because Hashem knows the nature of a person going through difficulty. Poor people are generally more humble, even if only of necessity. They are more aware that in their imaginings, they may have sinned, and this willingness to be wrong, brings them closer to atonement.

At the time of greatest good, we may mistakenly feel we're going through troubles. Therefore, Hashem commands these korbanos be brought some time after the baby has entered its parents' lives, and they realize how blessed they should have felt from the start.

A prince received a package from his father, the King. It was hand-delivered and the messenger conveyed how precious it was. With great anticipation, the prince opened it to find a delightful ornate keepsake box, inlaid with precious stones. He proudly displayed it on his mantelpiece.

When the King came to visit, he asked his son about the gift. The son replied that he liked it but was wondering why his father seemed so interested in something which, though nice, was not spectacular. He pointed to the mantel.

"Didn't you open it?" asked the King, "Inside was the deed to an estate right near the palace so you could come live near me! I wanted you close by - but you never came." ©2024 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Jewish Geography

As I discussed last week, Sefer Vayikra consists mostly of numerous communications between G-d and Moshe, with some taking place on Mt. Sinai and others taking place in the Mishkan. It's not always easy to figure out where each specific communication took place, including the communications contained in פרשת תזריע.

Our last "location marker" was in פרשת שמיני, when the Mishkan became fully operational. Since we weren't told otherwise – and we won't be told otherwise until פרשת בהר – we would understandably assume that these communications took place in the Mishkan. However, when Sifre Zuta (7:11) lists the 15 communications that occurred on the first day the Mishkan was fully operational, it skips every communication after Vayikra 10:8-11 (שתויי יין) until פרשת אחרי מות (Vayikra 16:1), indicating that they did not occur on that day – despite the apparent need to teach the various forms of ritual impurity discussed in these communications as soon as the Mishkan began operating.

According to Rashi and Tosfos, these communications aren't on R' Levi's list (Gittin 60a) of the eight sections taught that day either. Although some Rishonim (e.g. Ran, Ramah and Rabbeinu Crescas)

quote an opinion that they constitute “פרשת טמאים” (the third section on R’ Levi’s list), this opinion is difficult to accept. Putting aside the fact that this “section” contains six separate communications, they aren’t introduced the same way. The first (Vayikra 11:1) has G-d speaking to Moshe and Aharon, with instructions to repeat what was said to Aharon’s sons (see Targum Yonasan), who are to teach it to the Children of Israel; the second (12:1) has G-d speaking just to Moshe, who is supposed to teach it to the Children of Israel; the third (13:1) and fifth (14:33) have G-d speaking to both Moshe and Aharon, without specific instructions to teach it to anyone; the fourth (14:1) has G-d speaking only to Moshe, without any instructions to teach it to anyone; and the sixth (15:1) has G-d speaking to both Moshe and Aharon, with instructions to teach it to the Children of Israel (without mentioning Aharon’s sons). How can these separate communications be considered part of the same “section”? Either way, we need to understand why they aren’t on Sifre Zuta’s list, or – according to Rashi and Tosfos – R’ Levi’s list. Weren’t the details of ritual impurity necessary as soon as the Mishkan was operational?

Rashi (Beitza 5b; see also the commentary attributed to Rashi on Ta’anis 21b) says that G-d’s divine presence rested on Mt. Sinai from the time the Torah was given until the Mishkan became fully operational, at which point it moved to the Mishkan. The implication is that any communication between G-d and Moshe occurred either on Mt. Sinai (before the Mishkan was fully operational) or in the Mishkan (after it became fully operational). However, after the sin of the golden calf, Moshe moved his tent outside the camp, and G-d spoke to Moshe there (Shemos 33:9). Even though others (e.g. Vilna Gaon), say G-d’s divine presence didn’t stay on top of Mt. Sinai the whole time – so G-d speaking to Moshe elsewhere between the giving of the Torah and the Mishkan being built is not problematic – according to those who say it did (e.g. Rashi and Tosfos), how would they explain the “pillar of G-d’s cloud” descending to the doorway of Moshe’s tent if His divine presence was still on top of Mt. Sinai? (The “pillar” descending to the doorway of the Mishkan is not hard to explain, since the “cloud” it descended from covered the entire camp.)

Moshe moved his tent “far” from the camp (Shemos 33:7), which Rashi tells us means 2,000 cubits away. As I explained a few weeks ago (<https://dmkjewishgeography.wordpress.com/2024/03/18/vayikra-5784/>), there was another mountain (Ras Safsafeh) between the camp (which was on the Plain of El Raha) and Mt. Sinai (Jabal Musa), with access to Mt. Sinai from the camp via the adjacent valley (Wadi ed Deir). I would suggest that Moshe moved his tent to that valley, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and when G-d wanted to communicate with him (before the Mishkan project was back on and functioning), His “pillar” descended from atop Mt. Sinai to the area underneath it, at the entrance

of Moshe’s tent.

The third communication on Sifre Zuta’s list (Vayikra 9:2-4, although it’s really Moshe repeating it to Aharon) consisted of the instructions for the offerings brought on the “eighth day,” which were a prerequisite for G-d’s divine presence descending upon the Mishkan. Obviously, this communication occurred before the Mishkan was fully operational, so could not have taken place in the Mishkan itself. Similarly, the tenth communication on this list (Bamidbar 6:22-27), the Priestly Blessings, must have been communicated outside the Mishkan, since Aharon blessed the nation before G-d’s divine presence descended upon it (see Rashi on Vayikra 9:22). It would therefore seem, based on Shemos 33:9, that these two communications occurred in Moshe’s tent.

During the שבועת ימי המלואים, when Aharon and his sons were trained to perform the service in the Mishkan, they couldn’t leave the Mishkan complex (Vayikra 8:33-35). Did learning about the offerings take up all of their time, or were they taught other things as well? I would suggest that during these seven days, Moshe taught Aharon and his sons most of the purity laws, especially the complex laws of צרעת, which make up the bulk of פרשת תזריע. [The ritual impurity caused by childbirth was likely taught later, for reasons beyond the scope of this piece. It was certainly taught after the details of the ritual impurity caused by bodily emissions (15:19-24), as the latter are referenced in the details of the former (12:2).] If Moshe taught Aharon and his sons how to identify צרעת (and when it goes away) during the שבועת ימי המלואים, G-d must have communicated them to Moshe at least a week before the Mishkan became fully operational, which is why it’s not included in Sifre Zuta’s (or R’ Levi’s) list.

It’s certainly possible that the laws of צרעת (as detailed in פרשת תזריע) were taught to Moshe while he was atop Mt. Sinai (similar to the first part of פרשת צו). Nevertheless, they were addressed to both Moshe and Aharon (rather than just to Moshe, telling him to command them to Aharon), so were likely taught to Moshe shortly before the שבועת ימי המלואים, in his tent, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, rather than much earlier, on Mt. Sinai itself. © 2024 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Just Compensation

“**W**hen a woman conceives and gives birth to a male... (Vayikra 12:2) Chazal’s comment is well known, but little understood. “When a woman emits seed first, she gives birth to a male. When the male emits seed first, his wife gives birth to a female.” (Berachos 60a) Why should this be? Why should it be the woman who determines the birth of a male baby, and her husband the opposite? And why is this the introduction to the next verses, which deal with the mitzvah of milah?

There are mitzvos that are the exclusive province of women (e.g. the counting of days of the zavah; the korban of a woman who gives birth), and there are mitzvos that are only practiced by men. The Torah wished that everyone should be able to share in the reward for all mitzvos. One way this can happen is through one's children. The good deeds of a child confer merit to his/her parents.

A small number of time-bound mitzvos are obligatory only upon men. Hashem compensated a woman for this by giving her an outsize portion of the merit of her male offspring. Because she was responsible to a greater extent than her partner in creating her son, she is entitled to a larger portion of the parental credit. Similarly, Hashem arranged that it would be the husband who has a larger role in the creation of his daughter, and therefore enjoys more of the merit of the mitzvos that she will perform.

The mitzvah of bris milah is primarily incumbent upon a father. He is instructed to perform the circumcision, and not his wife. The Torah so instructs in order to restore a bit of parity between spouses in this hugely important mitzvah. After all, the effects of the milah stay with a person every day of his life, and remain a constant source of merit. Were the usual "rules" to apply, the mother would receive the larger share of parental merit for this mitzvah throughout the life of her sons. Hashem evens the score somewhat by making the father the sole authorized agent to perform the mitzvah, which grants him a larger share than he would otherwise be entitled to.

Chazal (Nidah 31b) teach that the Torah saw potential incompatibility of the simcha that everyone feels at the bris of a baby, with her forced post-partum separation from her husband. Therefore, the Torah reduced the fourteen days of tumah after the birth of a daughter to only seven in the case of a son. This would allow her to feel abundant joy at her return to her husband. According to our approach, however, there is an additional reason for her simcha on the day of the bris: because of her greater role in the creation of her son, she has a greater share in the mitzvah of milah, and all its continuing merit.

The says of HaKadosh Baruch Hu are indeed just -- and finely tuned. ©2024 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

In a previous issue, I mentioned that when most people assess themselves and their personal relationships, they focus primarily on one area: their relationships with others (friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, etc.). Those who contemplate the deeper meaning of existence and their place in the universe may also reflect on their relationship with the Almighty.

But there is a key relationship that almost

everyone intentionally ignores -- their relationship with themselves. The reason for this is that most people are afraid to confront the difficult questions that must be answered when assessing this relationship. Do I respect myself? Do I love myself? Can I trust myself? Do I even like myself (which is a very different question than do I love myself)?

Of course, many factors contribute to our complex self-relationship, but at the most basic level we need to have a clear vision of how we perceive ourselves. Unfortunately, self-image is often clouded or shaped by experiences in our lives that were outside of our control.

For example: A distant or difficult parent may have given us the impression that we were not worthy of love. A hypercritical (or just plain mean) teacher may have left us feeling unintelligent or incompetent. Self-absorbed and narcissistic friends or relatives may have made us feel unattractive or incapable of maintaining healthy friendships or relationships. Unfortunately, these factors often ruin our relationship with ourselves.

Conversely, a loving parent can give us the gift of understanding and ingrain in us the knowledge that we are worthy of love. An empowering teacher can confer a lifetime of self-esteem, and healthy friendships can teach us much about being trustworthy and loyal.

Perhaps the most damaging effect of an unhealthy self-image is that those who suffer from it constantly seek approval and validation from others. It should therefore come as no shock to anyone that we have whole segments of society today that constantly need our validation. We have to approve their lifestyle and endorse their life-choices or else they feel personally violated. It's very sad when someone's whole self-esteem is wrapped up in the acceptance of others.

I would venture to say that, unfortunately, many people live their entire lives with their self-image in the hands of others; it is determined by other people's perception of who they are, their actions, and approval. But this is a terrible mistake.

One of the great sages of the Talmud was known simply as "Rav -- master." The Talmud quotes a fascinating teaching from him: "Rav explained the following verse, 'Hashem will remove all illness from you' (Devarim 7:15) as a reference to the 'evil eye,' which is the source of most illness" (Bava Metzia 107b).

For thousands of years Jews have been concerned with "ayin hora -- the evil eye." Jewish law even maintains specific customs that are meant to avoid falling victim to ayin hora. Nowadays, many have adopted thoroughly meaningless practices to ward off ayin hora (perhaps the most ubiquitous is the practice of wearing a red string on one's wrist).

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, who died in 1986, was considered the preeminent sage of the second half of the 20th century. Rabbi Feinstein was world renowned for his genius and brilliant teachings and was said to have a

photographic memory. He would field questions from Jewish communities all over the world and render rulings. Eventually, these questions and answers were published as a nine-volume set known as Igros Moshe.

In relation to the concept of the ayin hora, Rabbi Feinstein ruled: "While we definitely need to be concerned with the 'evil eye' we should not be overly particular. With these types of matters, the principle is -- if one is not bothered by it, it doesn't bother him" (Even Ha'ezer 3:26).

This ruling is rather difficult to understand. We have many sources (such as the above teaching from Rav in the Talmud) that indicate that the "evil eye" is a serious issue, and Jewish law has many customs that have been adopted to avoid it. Does ayin hora have real efficacy or is it merely imagined?

The great medieval Biblical commentator known as Rashi informs us that one of the blessings that Jacob gave his son Joseph was that he should be impervious to the "evil eye" (see Genesis 49:22 and Rashi ad loc). This too requires an explanation, if ayin hora has a real power to it then how does a blessing to be impervious to it have any efficacy? For example, one cannot be "blessed" that a knife shouldn't pierce his skin. So how are we to understand the power of the "evil eye" and how does it really work? Is it just some mystical concept? Does it have a practical understanding from which we can learn how to overcome it or at least do our best to avoid it?

My father, who has a thorough understanding of Jewish mysticism but is also deeply rooted in the practical applications of Jewish philosophy and Jewish law in everyday life, explains the concept of ayin hora in the following manner.

Most people lead their lives (and also fashion their aspirations to achieve) by observing what everyone else does, has, or achieves. This constant attention to other's lifestyles -- what kind of car their neighbor is driving, how big their friend's house is, what prestigious universities their boss' children attend, etc. -- has nothing to do with one's level of religiosity; I have seen this behavior in even the most religious enclaves.

People then formulate their own goals by other's standards and perceptions. This causes them to seek a lifestyle determined by how they want to be perceived (e.g. clothes, cars, vacations, and homes). At the most basic level this would be called "keeping up with the Joneses."

This is exemplified by society's obsession with "reality TV." These shows give us a baseline to judge ourselves and our accomplishments; some shows make us feel superior (The Jerry Springer Show, Maury, Dr. Phil), while others leave us feeling insufficient or even jealous (Succession, Cribs).

On an even more basic level, consider the gnawing feeling you get when you know you are being watched. It's uncomfortable because you feel you are

constantly being judged and criticized. This scrutiny gives the observer a measure of control -- because we allow it to define how we act and how we feel about ourselves. This is the fundamental power of the "evil eye," and it can have a deleterious effect on us if we allow it.

Allowing other people's opinions to define us, and changing our behavior based on the actions and opinions of others, has a very real effect on our lives. That is the incredible power of ayin hora.

This is also the source of much of the lack of self-esteem and self-worth that many people have. Whether the origination of these insecurities came from one's parents, teachers, friends, or "celebrities," we are living within their real or imagined perceptions of us and that's a terrible thing.

We all have to face the daunting truth: We cannot go on living our lives blaming others for how we think, how we perceive ourselves, and how we behave. We have to take responsibility for ourselves and our lives; we must actively decide what we believe and how we wish to live.

This is very difficult to change, but it can be done. To begin, we must stop looking at everyone else and start looking within. What do I want to achieve? Why? What kind of person do I want to be? What path will give me a fulfilling and meaningful life? What makes me happy and what kind of lifestyle do I really need to be happy?

Only after we wrap our minds around who we really are can we address our core issues and start to live our own lives. When we stop being concerned with everyone else's lives AND stop being overly concerned with what they think of us, we can be released from the power of ayin hora. Perhaps, this is what Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, of blessed memory, meant when he said regarding it "if one is not bothered by it, it will not bother him." © 2024 Rabbi Y. Zweig and shabbatshalom.org

