

# PARSHIOS TAZRIA-METZORAH

by Shlomo Katz

## Parshios Tazria & Metzorah

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*As we go to press, we are devastated by the passing of our mentor Moreinu Harav Gedaliah ben Ze'ev Hakohen zt"l. When the idea of Hamaayan was first proposed to Rabbi Anemer in 1987, he strongly supported its publication, and his encouragement saved Hamaayan more than once when the burden of weekly publication seemed too great. May our continued Torah study be a merit for his neshamah, and may his bereaved community be consoled over their loss.*

**Today's Learning:**

**Machshirin 2:1-2**

**O.C. 456:1-3**

**Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sanhedrin 64**

**Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Pe'ah 27**

**Nach: Malachi 1-3**

*The study (as opposed to recitation) of Tehilim, at the rate of two chapters per day, will begin Sunday. R' Yaakov Lorberbaum, a major 18th century halachic authority and Talmud commentator (known as the "Nesivos") instructed in his will that his descendants study Tehilim so that they would pray more effectively in a time of need. Hamaayan's readers are encouraged to follow this advice.*

The Midrash Tanchuma on this week's parashah opens by citing the verse, "When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male . . ." Says the midrash: This is what Iyov meant (Iyov 29:2-4), "If only I could be as in the earlier months, as in the days when G-d would watch over me; when His lamp would shine over my head, and I would walk in darkness by His light; when I was in the days of my winter; when G-d's mystery was above my tent." [The commentary Beur Ha'amarim explains that the midrash cites these verses to explain the wording of the verse from our parashah. Why does it say, "When a woman conceives and gives birth"? Obviously, before she gives birth, she conceives! The midrash is answering that there is something special about the time between conception and birth, as will be explained.]

The midrash continues: When did Iyov say this? When troubles came upon him. He said, "If only I could be as in the earlier months"--like those days when I was in my mother's womb. "As in the days when G-d would watch over me"--this teaches that a fetus is watched-over in its mother's womb. "When His lamp would shine over my head"--this teaches that there is light for the fetus in his mother's womb. [The commentary Etz Yosef cites the Gemara (Niddah 30b) which teaches that, by this light, the fetus can see from one end of the world to the other. "Do not wonder at this statement," the Gemara adds, "for a person can be sleeping here [in Babylonia] and can see what is happening in Spain."] "When I was in the days of my winter"--just as the rain in winter muddies the earth, so a fetus in his mother's womb is dirty with bodily fluids. However, when the baby is born, it is washed-off. Likewise, concluded Iyov [as explained by commentaries], I understand the source of human suffering. It is the fact that mankind is sullied with sin. However, man can cleanse himself.

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"Upon the completion of the days of her purity . . . she shall bring a sheep within its first year for an elevation-offering, and a yonah or a tor for a sin-offering." (Vayikra 12:6)

R' Yaakov Ba'al Ha'turim z"l (14th century) comments that, of the two potential bird offerings, the yonah is mentioned before the tor because it is preferable to bring a yonah rather than a tor. Why? Because the species known as tor mourns when its spouse dies and never takes another spouse.

R' Akiva Yosef Schlesinger z"l (1835-1922; rabbi in Hungary and Yerushalayim) writes that in this light we can understand why the announcement of the eventual redemption is referred to in Shir Ha'shirim (2:12) as the "kol ha'tor" / "voice of the tor." We, too, mourn for the closeness to Hashem that we once enjoyed, and we have remained loyal to Him until He returns to us. (Tosfot Ben Yechiel)

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"If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a se'ait, or a sapachat, or a baheret, and it will become a tzara'at affliction on the skin of his flesh; he shall be brought to Aharon Hakohen, or to one of his sons the kohanim." (13:2)

Our Sages teach that tzara'at comes as a punishment for a number of sins. The best known of these is lashon hara; however, tzara'at also may occur as a punishment for haughtiness. R' Yaakov Leiner z"l (the Izbica Rebbe; died 1878) finds this alluded to in the words that the Torah uses to describe the various tzara'at wounds.

The first is "se'ait." The Izbica Rebbe notes that this word shares the same root as "hitnas'ut" / "elevating oneself." This, he writes, is the source of all sins. A person who thinks highly of himself feels entitled to enjoy all types of pleasures. On the other hand, a person who recognizes that he is "merely" a creation of Hashem's hand will be satisfied--indeed, happy--with whatever Hashem gives

him.

Another condition of tzara'at is "baheret." Based on a passage in the Zohar, the Izbica Rebbe writes that this refers to being so immersed in the goodness of this world that one actually lacks the free will to accept adversity. A person who suffers from this affliction will automatically become angry when things do not go his way because he cannot imagine life any other way.

Another condition is "michyah" (see Vayikra 13:24). This term is related to the word "chai" and refers to a person who thinks that he is very "alive," i.e., he thinks of himself as a great tzaddik. Such a person is quarantined--as is the law regarding one who has tzara'at--in order to send him the message that he is in fact quite distant from Hashem.

The last term that the Izbica Rebbe discusses actually provides consolation to the afflicted. That term is "nega" (found repeatedly in this parashah). This is related to the word "nogai'a" / "touching" and conveys the message that one who experiences tzara'at is not necessarily mired in sin, in which case his situation would be nearly hopeless. Rather, he is merely "touching" sin and is able to pull himself away and purify himself. (Bet Yaakov)

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## Shabbat

"On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." (Vaykira 12:3)

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 59b) states that, although the mitzvah of brit milah was already taught earlier in the Torah, it is repeated here to emphasize, "On the eighth day" - even when it falls on Shabbat. [If not for this specific source, brit milah would be prohibited on Shabbat because it involves forbidden labors.]

What is special about brit milah that makes it supersede the prohibitions of Shabbat?

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) explained in a seudah shelishit address in 5691 (1931): Unlike most mitzvot, brit milah and Shabbat both involve performing an act of self-sacrifice now that creates holiness that affects the person's entire future. When a baby is circumcised, he undergoes self-sacrifice--a physical operation--but is instilled with a spirit of kedushah which remains with him for his entire life and influences his future actions. Likewise, when one observes Shabbat, he undergoes self-sacrifice--refraining from work--but is instilled with a neshamah yeteirah / "extra soul" which makes his Shabbat "m'ein Olam Haba" / "a foretaste of the World-to-Come." Because brit milah is thus a mitzvah which complements the message of Shabbat, it is permitted on Shabbat.

The Gemara (cited above) states that mitzvot which are mentioned in the Torah both before and after the story of the Giving of the Torah (for example, the prohibition on committing murder; see Bereishit 9:6) apply to both Jews and non-Jews. Why then, asks the Gemara, does brit milah (which

is mentioned in Parashat Lech Lecha and here) not apply to both Jews and non-Jews? The Gemara answers that brit milah does not count as a mitzvah that is mentioned twice because it is repeated after Matan Torah (i.e., in our parashah) only to teach the detail that it supersedes Shabbat. In light of the above, R' Kook adds, we can say that it is not merely a detail that brit milah supersedes Shabbat. To the contrary, this fact teaches us the very nature of the mitzvah. (Shemuot Ha'Reiyah: Bereishit p.57)

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## **Pirkei Avot**

"[Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said to his students]: Go out and discern which is the evil path from which a person should distance himself. Rabbi Eliezer says, 'A bad eye.' Rabbi Yehoshua says, 'A wicked friend.' Rabbi Yose [Hakohen] says, 'A wicked neighbor.' Rabbi Shimon [ben Netanel] says, 'One who borrows and does not repay.' . . . Rabbi Elazar ben Arach says, 'A wicked heart'." (Chapter 2)

Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (Spain; died 1263) comments: In the immediately preceding passage, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai asked his students their opinions of the proper path to which a person should cling. Why is he now asking their opinions of the evil path from which a person should distance himself? Wouldn't he expect them to just give the opposite of their prior answers?

R' Yonah explains: At first glance, the opposite of a good trait is not bad. For example, the trait of "chassidut" refers to going beyond the letter of the law. One who is not a "chassid" is not bad. To the contrary, if he observes the letter of the law, he is a "tzaddik."

R' Yonah continues: Rabbi Eliezer identified "a good eye" (i.e., generosity) as the proper path, and "a bad eye" (i.e., miserliness) as the path to avoid. One might have argued that generosity is good, but the absence of generosity is neutral, since it does not deprive others of that which belongs to them. Rabbi Eliezer teaches that this is not the case. In fact, Rabbi Eliezer is teaching us that our initial assumption is incorrect. It is bad not to strive to be a "chassid." This is what King Shlomo meant when he wrote (Kohelet 10:1), "Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's oil; a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor." One might argue: Flies are so tiny! How can they spoil a large vat of perfume?! Nevertheless, it is a fact that they do. So, too, a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. The absence of even one good trait has a significant effect on a person's overall quality.

Regarding the responses of Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Yose (respectively, "A wicked friend" and "A wicked neighbor"), R' Yonah comments: Do not be one! [By this comment, R' Yonah is teaching that the focus is not on our friends' and neighbors' behavior, but on our own.]

Finally, regarding the observation of Rabbi Shimon, that the path to avoid is that of a person who borrows and does not repay, R' Yonah comments: Rabbi Shimon said that the proper path is to foresee the future. One might think that a person cannot be criticized for not foreseeing the future, for maybe this requires special talent. Rabbi Shimon is illustrating, however, that there are everyday

consequences to failing to foresee the future. One example, which is all-too-common, is when a person borrows money without having any idea of where he will obtain the funds to repay his debt. (Commentary to Pirkei Avot)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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