

HERE TODAY, GONE TUMA-ROW

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be impure for a seven-day period . . .
(Vayikra 12:2)

This week's discussion turns to the topic of "tuma" - spiritual impurity. The parshah begins talking about the birth of a boy and the mitzvah of Bris Milah, but it is really for the sake of discussing the mother's spiritual status post-partum.

It is not hard to figure out why the Torah felt compelled to place these laws here. As we have said, the point of the avodah is to elevate us and creation back to its pre-sin state. Tuma is a function of the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil itself, and more specifically, interaction with the Nachach - the Snake - as the Talmud states:

When the Snake "interacted" with Chava it imparted to her zuhama (tuma) . . . (Shabbos 146a)

However, unlike the tuma spoken about in these parshios, zuhama is an indelible form that will not be removed until the person dies, dissolves in the ground, and is resurrected again as a whole new entity:

. . . Hence, it would seem that not everyone will die at the same time, and therefore, in any case (even if resurrection is immediate for a person after they die) it will not occur at the same time for everyone. For, someone who has rid himself of zuhama early will die earlier and therefore resurrect earlier, because the only reason for death at that time will be to dissolve the physicality of the body so that it can be created anew, and thus, the duration of time from death to resurrection will be the same for everyone. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 488)

The zuhama remained with mankind, except for a brief period when the Jewish People rid themselves of it when they stood at Mt. Sinai and received the Torah (Shabbos 146a). As a result of the sin of the golden calf, part of the zuhama returned to the Jewish People, continuing the necessity of death and resurrection.

This, perhaps, is implied by the word "nachash" itself, which is equal in gematria to the word "Moshiach," who represents the beginning of the end of this horrible spiritual handicap. As the Talmud reveals, in Yemos HaMoshiach, G-d will take the yetzer hara - the Nachash - and slaughter him (Succah 52a). However, as we have said, the zuhama will not be completely eliminated until we

return to the state of Kesones Ohr (with the Aleph), as we spoke about in the previous weeks.

The scary thing about spiritual impurity is that it distorts a person's perspective of reality. Like a person with a mental illness that prevents him from appreciating his mental "challenge," zuhama actually limits a person's ability to relate to his lack of spirituality, allowing him to live a blissful life in spiritual oblivion, until, of course, right before death.

According to tradition, just before a person dies, his yetzer hara is completely removed from him, and he can see life as it REALLY was, not as he imagined it. Imagine the horror! Imagine the shock! Imagine the sense of waste as life in this world becomes a portal to the next stage of life, and the need to account for one's life!

However, this is true for the person who failed to realize this during his life, and do something about it. This is what teshuvah is all about. It is about emerging from the depths of spiritual impurity to the best of one's ability, in order to gain greater clarity about life and one's role within it. Free-will depends upon do this, because otherwise the person cannot objectively ponder a choice.

SHABBOS DAY:

Upon the completion of the days of her impurity for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring a sheep within its first year for a burnt-offering . . . (Vayikra 12:6)

Spiritual illness differs from physical illness in a couple of ways. The most profound difference is that a person who is spiritually "ill" can feel perfectly fine physically. In order to preserve free-will, G-d made it possible for a person to physically enjoy life even while living without a G-d consciousness.

However, G-d is a just G-d. There is no such thing as "having one's cake and eating it too" when it comes to bucking spiritual obligations for the sake of physical pleasures. If it appears otherwise, it is only a temporary situation necessary, again, to preserve free-will. As they say, "You can pay us now, or you can pay us later." But PAY you must - EVERYONE must pay. No one will be able to say, "This Heavenly punishment is nothing compared to the illicit pleasure I had while alive. It was worth it!"

More likely, the person will say, "What made me think THEN that I would prefer THIS treatment in exchange for THAT pleasure?!"

The answer, of course, is tuma. Tuma is like a veil over a person's mind's eye that blurs their perception of reality. They may view the world physically with 20-20 vision, but depending upon how deeply a person is immersed in tuma, their intellectual take on the situation will be quite blurry and obscured.

This was how Adam HaRishon was able to disobey G-d and eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In his pre-sin state, he could NEVER have disobeyed G-d by eating, even for "good" reasons. Free of tuma, he could only see reality as G-d does; there would have been no room for rationalization. An initial state of tuma had to first exist before Adam could sin as he did.

This was the first stumbling block for Adam HaRishon: he allowed himself to look at the strength of the Chitzonim, to understand the extent of their power; he investigated how they operate in general and in detail. He delved into this using his great wisdom until they pursued him and became attached to him, as the Zohar explains. In the beginning, he had acted this way for the sake of Heaven, assuming that The Holy One, Blessed is He, only warned him against eating, but not touching. Thus, [he assumed,] the only prohibition was against tasting and enjoying it, whereas approaching and touching it was not. Therefore, [he deduced that] investigating was also permissible, for it was only on the level of touching and not eating, the latter of which is more a matter of tasting and enjoying. He relied upon his great wisdom to protect him from being seduced after them into actually enjoying them. His wisdom was his stumbling block, though his intentions were for the sake of Heaven. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 342)

What are "Chitzonim?" It comes from the Hebrew word "chutz" which means "outside," as in, "Chutz L'Aretz," the term used for everywhere outside of Eretz Yisroel. It is the technical Kabbalistic term for life on the spiritual periphery, at the farthest reaches from G-d. Thus, a sacrifice is called a "Korban," from the Hebrew word that means "to come close," because it is designed to help a person return from the brink of spiritual oblivion back towards G-d. Thus, it is a necessary part of the purification process from tuma.

Thus, the Leshem is explaining, Adam had never intended to sin, G-d forbid. He had only intended to study and understand the kochos hatuma - the ability of spiritual impurity - from a safe distance. Having been created on such a high spiritual level, he had assumed that he was immune to their effects. We are the proof that he was not:

... It was not that evil ascended to his [high] level to seduce him, because he was simply too high then. It is impossible for evil to ascend so high in any way, G-d forbid. Rather, man descended to the place of evil, which is very low, and then he was drawn after them until he clung to them ... After Adam went down to them and stumbled, immediately Adam HaRishon descended tremendously [spiritually] as did all the [spiritual] worlds with him, until they reached their present level. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 444)

In other words, eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was not the beginning of the sin, it was the end of it. First, Adam had to enter a state of spiritual impurity, which has the effect of distancing a person from G-d and objective reality. The Adam HaRishon who ate from the Tree was a very different one from the Adam HaRishon who first thought to investigate the reality of tuma. It is no different for anyone else since then, as we shall see, G-d willing.

SEUDOS SHILSHIS:

And the person with tzara'as in whom there is the affliction - his garments shall be rent, the hair of his head shall be unshorn, and he shall cloak himself up to the lips; he is to call out, "Impure, impure!" (Vayikra 13:45)

The laws of spiritual "leprosy" - the Heaven-sent physical affliction for particular sins - is discussed in the rest of the parshah. Unlike a woman who gives birth, this state of spiritual impurity was not the result of an event that is part-and-parcel of life, but is the result of an abuse of life itself.

As a result, the Torah is harsh on him, sending him outside the community to dwell alone for the duration of his impurity, forcing him to verbally proclaim his spiritual state before all to hear. For, one of the major causes of tzara'as is the speaking of loshon hara, derogatory speech about another, said to be the craft of the Original Snake. (Rashi, Shemos 4:3)

Part of the treatment of the Metzora is to remove him from his tuma, to remove the veils from over his spiritual eye that blinded him and allowed him to slip so easily into his erring ways. Until this is done, he will not truly do teshuvah because his vision of reality will remain unchanged.

That's why it is imprudent to consider the opinion of one who is immersed in tuma, even if they like to take the moral high ground on an issue. Someone who sees nothing wrong with committing what the Torah calls grave sins, whether out of desire or even "just as a profession," cannot be relied upon for an accurate assessment of a life situation. Morality is an absolute, something that is all-or-nothing, and as long as a person is immersed in tuma, his vision is that of one looking at the outside world from below the surface of the water.

(This, of course, excludes one who is fighting to leave the realm of tuma, someone who is called "Chozar b'Teshuvah." Because they are sincerely trying to break the bonds of tuma, their vision of reality is more trustworthy.)

It doesn't make a difference how rich or how famous the person is. Some of the richest and most famous people in history have built their estates in the deepest depths of tuma, and voiced their opinions about life from there. However, being that the realm of tuma at this stage of history is so all encompassing, they have very large audiences to attract and sway.

But it's really all the Jews' fault, as the Talmud reminds us:

All punishment comes to the world because of the Jewish People, as it says, "I have eliminated nations, their towers have become desolate" (Tzeephaniah 3:6), and it says, "I said, 'Just fear Me, accept My chastisement . . .'" (Ibid. 7). (Yevamos 63a)

After all, we were the ones charged to be a "light unto nations," to do the avodah and thereby elevate the rest of the world out of the depths of tuma, thereby removing the many veils that hide the hand of G-d in all that occurs. This is why the Talmud states:

Woe to the nations of the world who destroyed [the Temple], for while the Temple still stood it atoned for them. Now, what will atone for them? (Succah 55b)

Destroy it? Had they known how the Temple was their path out of the realm of tuma, says the Midrash, they would have built walls around it instead to protect it!

MELAVE MALKAH:

A song of ascents. To You I raised my eyes, O You Who dwell in the heavens. (Tehillim 123:1)

If it wasn't for me, [G-d] wouldn't dwell in the heavens. (Midrash Shmuel Rabbasa, Parshah 5)

In other words, because the posuk writes "Hayoshvei" and not "Hayoshev," it is as if I cause Him to dwell in the heavens." (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 48)

What does this mean? Since when has G-d needed anything from man? Never! And, thus begins the discussion called, "Avodah Tzorech Gavoah" - service for the sake of High.

The matter is like this: all the Names of G-d are the revelations that the Emanator Ain Sof (G-d) revealed in Atzilus, specifically for the sake of revealing his G-dliness below. If so, then they only have meaning when [man] below accepts his G-dliness and admits to it. If not, G-d forbid, then there would be no such revelations at all. Instead, His Essence would remain and Its truth hidden, just as it was before creation. Therefore, the Names of G-d, May He be blessed, only remain revealed as a result of Israel, when they accept His G-dliness and admit to Him. However, without this, the revelations would be returned to the sources (and all of creation would be immediately eliminated, since all of it exists only for the revelations of His light). (Ibid.)

This quote hits right at the heart of a very important matter that most take for granted, even those who believe in G-d and Torah. It's message is particularly important, not just in light of the discussion we have been having over the last couple of parshios, but in light of the present world situation that has everyone on edge.

The average person's understanding of G-d is quite simplistic, which is what has led some to assume that different Names for G-d in the Torah imply different authors writing at different times of history. Rather than use the various Names of G-d to hint to a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of our role and responsibility in creation, they use them as an excuse to abandon the belief in Torah from Sinai.

Such a belief is not permitted, even for a gentile. However, it is outright dangerous when a Jew believes such a thing, or at least he doesn't appreciate what the Names of G-d mean in terms of His avodah. We don't appreciate how a war is being waged in the world because of the Jewish People, and that chaos is rampant because of our over-simplistic understanding of the concept of avodah.

However, it is not really as the Anti-Semites would like to claim, or how the conspiracy theorists understand it. We're not talking about Jews in the inner circle of President Bush, white-washing him into a war he would have otherwise avoided, having convinced him to spend billions of US tax dollars to send 250,000 troops and armadas of ships to take out an evil man and his family.

Rather, it is as the Torah teaches and the Leshem elucidates. In other words, we are watching the effect of what happens when Klal Yisroel fails to draw down the light of Ain Sof, when we fail to be

ready for revelations of G-d's Names.

Sounds Kabbalistic? It is. But so were the sacrifices, and so are our tefillos. In fact, all of our avodah is "marinated" in Kabbalistic tradition, as we shall continue to discuss next week, b'ezras Hashem.

Had we known a little about this back in 1991 when Persian Gulf War I had ended on Purim, we would not have had to bear witness to Persian Gulf War II, which began on Purim.

Have a great Shabbos,
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