

ONLY YOU ARE CALLED "ADAM"

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Tazria-Metzorah

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 501, Milah and the Sick Baby. Good Shabbos!

Only You Are Called "Adam"

The bulk of the Parshiyos of Tazria and Metzorah deal with the intricate laws of a person, his clothing, or his dwelling contracting Tzara'ath, and what the person must do to regain the status of Ta'hara [purity].

These laws begin with the words: *"Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon saying: 'If a person will have (Adam ki yiheye) on the skin of his flesh an intensely white pot, or one nearly so, or a shiny white one, and it forms a plague of leprosy in the skin of his flesh, then shall he be brought to Aharon the priest, or to one of his sons, the priests.'"* [Vayikra 13:1-2]

I saw an interesting observation from Rav Shlomo Ganzfried. In his commentary on Chumash (Aperion), Rav Ganzfried wonders why the Torah chose the term "Adam" to describe a person at the start of the laws of Tzara'ath (rather than the more common "Ish"). Rav Ganzfried suggests that Adam is a connotation for a human that has no plural form. (The plural of "ish" is "anashim", but the plural of "adam" is not "adamim"!)

With this principle, Rav Ganzfried explains a famous Gemara that is troubling to many people. In a number of places, the Talmud says, "You are called Adam, but the nations of the world are not called Adam" [Yevamos 61a; Bava Metzia 114b; Kerisus 6b].

The simple meaning of the above-quoted Talmudic passage would be that the connotation of the specific word 'Adam' is only appropriate to use about Jews. However, the meaning of this statement is certainly not that only Jews are considered human and non-Jews are considered sub-human. Heaven forbid! That is not the meaning of the Gemara.

Rav Ganzfried explains as follows. The Hebrew language is extremely precise in terms of the

different connotations of apparent synonyms. The singular term "Adam" fits the Jews. All Jews are considered as a single entity. There is no dichotomy. We are all in this together. The reason why the word "Adam" is employed referring to Jews is because this is the only term for humanity that has no plural and the Jewish people are a singular people. Their one-ness is most appropriately expressed by the word "Adam."

With this introduction, Rav Ganzfried adds, we can appreciate why the section of leprosy begins with the term "Adam." As Chazal tell us, Tzara'as comes as a result of speaking Lashon HaRah [slander]. Homiletically, the word Metzora is linked to the expression Motzi Rah [one who speaks evil]. The pasuk is teaching that when one speaks Lashon Hara, the divisiveness attacks and destroys the singularity of the Jewish people, endangering our status of "Adam."

This idea serves as the introduction to the whole section of Tza'raath laws. We have to remember that we Jews are called "Adam." We must view ourselves as one big body. We are all in this together and dare not slander one another.

I read an incident dating back to the Beilus blood libel. In 1912, in Russia, Mendel Beilus was accused of killing a Christian child and using his blood to bake Matzahs. This slander or variations of it were unfortunately prevalent in Europe for many, many years. They were known as blood libels. Beilus' lawyer was afraid that to buttress their case, the accusers would make the argument that Jews considered non-Jews less than human. He was in fact afraid that they would cite the above-quoted Talmudic reference to prove this very point.

The lawyer therefore visited the Chortkever Rebbe and asked him how he could respond if the opposing lawyers would throw that Gemara at him. The Rebbe said as follows: If an Italian was seized and put on trial, we would not witness a scenario where all Italians were congregating in their churches to pray for this one Italian. The same can be said about the French for a Frenchman, and so too about all other nations. However, when a Jew is seized and put on trial, the solidarity that Jews have toward each other will make every Jew throughout the world stop and pray for the welfare of that other Jew.

We do not have to go back to the Beilus trial to see the accuracy of this observation. In our day and time, we have witnessed many examples of such solidarity. If a single Jew is seized or held hostage, Jews all over the world congregate and pray for that one fellow Jew. Who is like your nation Israel -- one nation in the land? Is there another nation where everyone feels a sense of responsibility and one-ness with each other?

This is how the Chortkever Rebbe explained the Gemara "You are called Adam." Only you are considered a single unit, whereby it is impossible to speak of the plural of Adam. This is not a racist interpretation. It is not bigoted. It is an attribute of the Jews that has been demonstrated time and time again in both recent and ancient times.

The Two-Step Process Necessary To Be Pronounced "Tameh"

The Torah continues to describe the procedures for determining the presence of the Tzara'as condition: *"The Kohen shall look at the affliction on the skin of his flesh; If hair in the affliction has turned white, and the affliction's appearance is deeper than the skin of his flesh -- it is a tzara'as affliction; the Kohen shall look at it and make him impure."* [Vayikra 13:3]

The Meshech Chochma cites a Torah Kohanim that is bothered by an apparent redundancy in this pasuk. In fact, this is a redundancy that actually jumps out at us. The pasuk begins with the phrase "The Kohen shall look at" and virtually the same phrase is repeated at the end of the pasuk. Why?

The Meshech Chochma suggests (as opposed to the lesson derived by Torah Kohanim itself) that the pasuk is teaching us that there are two evaluations that need to be made. First the Kohen looks at the affliction (v'ra-ah haKohen es haNega) and sees if it is one that technically meets the definition of a Tzara'as blemish. Then he looks at the person (v'ra-ah-hu haKohen) and sees if it is appropriate to declare him impure.

This means that even after the Kohen has determined that the blemish is a Tzara'as blemish, he still has two options. He still must determine whether it is appropriate to declare the individual impure. The pasuk emphasizes that before the Kohen makes the determination about a person - whether he is tameh or not - the Kohen must look at him!

The Meshech Chochmah cites a Gemara that gives practical application to this insight: "If he is a Chosson (newly-wed) he is given the Seven Days of Feasting (before declaring him Tameh) and the same applies on a Festival." [Moed Katan 7b] In other words, in order to avoid spoiling one's wedding celebration or his Yom Tov, the Kohen has license to delay proclaiming the person a Metzora, even though he knows full well that the skin condition qualifies as Tzara'as!

Although the Talmud does not cite Biblical support for this Halacha, and seems to quote it as part of the Oral Tradition, the Meshech Chochmah finds allusion to this license in the apparent redundancy of our pasuk. The Kohen is not faking the outcome or fudging the facts. Rather, the Torah merely gives him license to evaluate two independent factors: (a) Whether the blemish is Tzara'as and (b) whether at this particular time it is appropriate to make the person into a Metzora. Unless both factors are present, the Kohen will not and should not declare the person tameh.

I saw a story in one of Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski's books involving Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski. A fellow once came to the noted Rabbinic authority in Vilna and told him that his father was trying to obtain a position as Rabbi in a certain European city. He asked Rav Chaim Ozer for a letter of approbation to the community in question, recommending the fellow's father for the position.

Rav Chaim Ozer felt that the person was not appropriate for the position and declined to write the letter. He excused himself saying that he did not want to mix into the politics of that city and apologized for not being able to write the letter. The young man started yelling and cursing Rav

Chaim Ozer (the leading Torah authority of his day). Rav Chaim excused himself, walked out of the room, and did not say anything.

Rav Chaim Ozer's disciples questioned their Rebbe -- how could he let those insults go by in silence? The audacity of that young man to talk this way to the "Gadol HaDor" demanded a harsh response, they argued. Rav Chaim Ozer explained, "This is a son who is worried about his father's livelihood. His love and concern for his father got the best of him. Of course he said things that he should not have said. However, this was not the time and place to lace into him and put him in his place. He was after all, only a child trying to help his father."

This, perhaps, is a broader application of the principle inherent in our pasuk: Before we can pronounce a person "tameh", we need to look at him, give him a comprehensive evaluation, and determine whether at this particular juncture in time, he deserves to be pronounced "tameh." Not always is it fit for a person who may be "tameh" to be pronounced as such.

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