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To: parsha@parsha.net
From: cshulman@gmail.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **Tazria Metzora** - 5777

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from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com>

date: Wed, Apr 26, 2017

Maternity Sacrifice

by R. Gil Student

I. New Mothers

In Temple times, childbirth included two ritual elements that some may find surprising. One is a long period (40 or 80 days) of impurity and the other is a requirement to bring a sacrifice that includes a chatas, a sin offering (Lev. 12). Why does the Torah require for childbirth, a joyous occasion, this extended term ending with a sin offering? For this reason (and the Nazirite chatas), along with linguistic concerns, one modern scholar declares that chatas must refer to purification and not sin. ((Milgrom, Anchor Bible, Leviticus vol. 1 p. 253)) However, classical scholars connect chatas with sin, raising the question what sin can be involved with childbirth. These two issues may be separate but they might be linked.

II. Seclusion

Ramban (Lev. 12:4) notes that in ancient times, a menstruant or woman who recently gave birth was shunned, forced to stay indoors. For reasons that are unclear, the Torah legislated this by declaring a woman impure at those times. The Ramban starts with the same data but takes it in the opposite direction. ((Moreh Nevukhim 3:47)) He argues that rather than sustaining the ancient practice, the Torah wished to subvert it. To the pagans, a menstruant or new mother was excluded from the public entirely, due to demons or other suspected dangers that accompanied her. The Torah only excludes her from the Temple but implicitly allows her to go everywhere else. As it does elsewhere, the Torah seeks to remove pagan practices by severely limiting them.

Baruch Levine connects this law to ancient worship of fertility goddesses. To prevent such fertility worship, the Torah forces a disconnect between childbirth and religious worship. ((JPS Torah Commentary, Leviticus excursus 3)) In contrast, Abarbanel (ad loc.) disconnects this rule from pagan practices. Instead, he suggests simply that a new mother bleeds for a long time and requires 40 days to heal from childbirth.

III. Sin Offering

But what sin could prompt the chatas? Ramban (ibid., 7) quotes the Sages who suggest that a woman giving birth makes vows against her husband that she will never keep. Therefore, she brings the sin offering to atone for the broken vow. Abarbanel offers a curious answer. He says that women giving

birth are in a life threatening situation and no one faces danger without having committed a sin. Therefore, new mothers must have sinned. This calculus is suspicious but perhaps we can add to it another possible meaning. R. Ari Kahn notes that women suffer during childbirth because of Eve's sin and punishment. The entire process of childbirth is framed by the fateful sin in the Garden of Eden. That is the reason women are placed in danger and, perhaps, therefore, why they must bring a sin offering. It is not for their own sin but for Eve's. ((Explorations, p. 243))

IV. A Woman's Perspective

It is left to a woman -- a childless woman -- to turn this discussion around. All previous commentaries revolved around sin and impurity, for obvious reasons. Nechama Leibowitz sees it all entirely differently and connects the new mother's lengthened state of impurity and sin offering. ((New Studies in Vayikra, pp. 176-182))

Childbirth is a miraculous process. It vividly demonstrates the greatness of God, who creates a living being inside another. In contrast, we mere humans shrink into insignificance and impotence. After experiencing childbirth, a new mother has greater cognizance of her own limitations and her own sinfulness.

Perhaps this explains the impurity and the sin-offering in the context of the woman after childbirth. The new life within her made her deeply conscious of the greatness of the Creator, as also of her insignificance as "dust and ashes" and impurity. Hence the need for a sin-offering. ((Ibid., p. 181))

From torahweb@torahweb.org

9:45 PM (2 hours ago)

to weeklydt

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

Equal Value

Much of Parshas Tazria focuses on the laws of tzara'as - when does tzara'as render a person or a garment tamei and when does it not do so. But before the Torah begins its discussion of tzara'as, it first talks about the halacha of tumas leidah. "If a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be tamei'ah for seven days...And if she gives birth to a girl, she shall be tamei'ah for two weeks. (Tazria 12:2,5)" This is the Torah's introduction to the laws of tzara'as. The question is what is the connection between these two halachos?

What's more, the halacha of tumas leidah itself seems puzzling. Why should a woman become tamei'ah when she gives birth to a baby? We commonly associate tumah with death. Giving birth is the exact opposite. Why should bringing a new life into the world make a woman tamei'ah?

The Gemara (Arachin 16a-16b) lists a number of different aveiros which cause tzara'as, the most famous of which is lashon hara. Chazal comment that it is for this reason that a metzora must be quarantined outside the camp as a punishment for having separated between people through his divisive speech. Rashi, at the beginning of Parshas Metzora, mentions a second cause for tzara'as. The posuk (Metzora 14:4) says that as part of his purification process, a metzora must take a branch from a cedar tree, a red thread from a worm, and some grass. Rashi quotes the Midrash which explains that tzara'as afflicts a person when he acts with arrogance and haughtiness like a tall cedar tree. What is his cure? He should lower himself like a worm and lowly grass.

It seems as though Chazal are giving two separate causes for tzara'as - lashon hara and arrogance. But actually these two aveiros might be related to each other. What Chazal might be alluding to is that sometimes a person speaks lashon hara because he thinks too highly of himself, so he belittles other people. He does not appreciate their value. Other times, a person might speak lashon hara because he has low self-esteem. He wants to be able to think highly of himself, so he knocks other people and denigrates them in order to build himself up.

What is the cure for such an individual? He has to correct his perception of himself relative to other people. If only he would realize that everyone has a

unique role to play in this world, and that no one person's contribution is more important than that of anyone else, he would not denigrate other people. If only he realized the value of his own contribution, he would not feel the need to speak ill of other people just to enhance his self-worth.

Perhaps this is why the Torah prefaces its discussion of tzara'as by first talking about tumas leidah. Why does a woman become teme'ah when she gives birth? One reason might be because a living Jewish child has left her body. It does not matter that this young baby has yet to accomplish anything, that on the surface there seems to be nothing special about this child. What matters is that the baby has the potential to act with kedusha, to fill its life with Torah and mitzvos. So when its mother gives birth and she loses this source of life, she becomes teme'ah.

The halacha of tumas leidah highlights the idea that all Jews are created equal. What generates tumas leidah is the inherent value of each and every Jewish child. Non-Jews are not subject to the halacha of tumas leidah (Toras Kohanim, Tazria 1:1) because they don't have the same potential for kedusha that a Jewish child has. But every Jew is endowed at birth with an ability to live with kedusha. At birth, every Jewish child, male or female, has the same natural connection to kedusha and ruchinyus that he or she had in the womb. And that is why the birth of a Jewish child generates tumas for its mother because by giving birth the mother has lost this source of kedusha.

This is the lesson that a metzora must internalize in order to do a complete teshuva for his lashon hara and arrogance. He has to appreciate that no Jew is more important than any other because everyone has the potential for kedusha; every Jew has a special role to play in the mission of Klal Yisrael. That is why the Torah mentions the halacha of tumas leidah right before it begins its discussion of tzara'as to emphasize that the way to avoid the aveiros which cause tzara'as is by being sensitive to the message of tumas leidah.

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Rabbi Reisman - Parshas Tazria 5776

1. Let's start with a beautiful Vort on the Parsha of the Metzora. Tazria and Metzora both have the Dinnim of a Metzora. As you all know, a Metzora, someone who is afflicted with Tzaras is placed outside of the Machaneh. It is interesting that this is not mentioned in these two Parshios at all. It is mentioned first in Parshas Naso. In Parshas Naso we read as is found in Bamidbar 5:2 (כל-צרוע, צו, אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְיִשְׁלְחוּ מִן-הַמַּחֲנֶה) We learn there that the Halacha is that someone with Tzaras is sent out of the Machaneh. The question of course being, why is it there, what is the message of sending a Metzora out of the Machaneh, and needing an insight into Tzaras based on that.

Another question, why does it say (צו, אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְיִשְׁלְחוּ מִן-הַמַּחֲנֶה) it should say Tzav Es Bnei Yisrael V'yeitzei Kol Tzarua Min Hamachaneh like every other Mitzvah. HKB"H commands the Klal Yisrael to do the Mitzvah. The person who it is Nogea to is commanded. All this needs some explanation.

There is a beautiful explanation in the Divrei Yoel on Parshas Naso on page # Kuf Mem and it is based on a technical point. That is that in Lashon Kadosh the phrase sending someone away can be expressed in one of two words. Either in the language of Geirushin as is found in Shemos 11:1 (גרש) in Parshas Bo or with the Lashon of Shelichos as is found in Beraishis 32:4 (וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מִקְּאֵיכִים). You can send somebody with a Lashon of Geirushin or with a Lashon of Shelichus.

As a matter of fact, when HKB"H tells Moshe Rabbeinu that the Yidden will leave Mitzrayim we see as is found in 6:1 (כִּי בָּדַד תִּזְקָה, וְיִשְׁלַחְתֶּם, וּבָבֶד תִּזְקָה), Both expressions are mentioned and we will come back to that later. But first what is Nogea to a Metzora. The difference is that Geirushin is when you send someone away the purpose is to get him away from here. He is not going any place purposeful. The idea is get him out.

Dovid Hamelech says to Shaul as it says in the end of Shmuel Aleph 26:19 (כִּי-גֵרְשׁוּנִי הָיִים מִהַקְּסִיפְתָּ בְּנִהְלֹתִי יָרֵךְ). When Shaul was chasing him, Dovid said

to him you chased me away from Eretz Yisrael. (גֵּרְשׁוּנִי) is a Lashon of being sent away because you are not wanted in place number 1.

Shelichus however, is when there is a purpose in place # 2. In the place that you are going there is a purpose in being there. You send a Shaliach to do something that you want him to do.

A Metzora is described as someone who is afflicted, it had something to do with him, the individual. He has got a problem. He speaks Lashon Hora so he has Tzaras, or whatever Aveira brings Tzaras to happen. When he is sent away it is a Gairushin. You send him out of the Machaneh because he doesn't deserve to be here.

Later in Parshas Naso, where the Posuk describes where people belong as Parshas Naso has the Degalim, we learn (צו, אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְיִשְׁלְחוּ מִן-הַמַּחֲנֶה, כָּל-צָרוּעַ). You should know that if someone is a Tzarua and he is being sent out of the Machaneh, he is sent somewhere. When HKB"H gives someone a Tzar or a Tzara and he has to go someplace. Sometimes Lo Aleinu somebody is ill and he has to go for treatment to a different city. It is a Shlichus, he is being sent there, he is going there for a purpose. It is not just being chased away from here. It is being there.

I heard a beautiful line regarding this. There was a Chossid from the west coast who anticipated spending Yomim Noraim with his Rebbe on the east coast. His flight from LA to NY which took place on the day of Erev Rosh Hashana encountered some engine trouble and he landed in Texas. To his dismay, he was going to have to spend Rosh Hashana in some city in Texas. He called the Rebbe and wanted at least a Beracha for a good year. He said to the Rebbe I am stuck in Texas. To which the Rebbe replied, stuck? A Jew is never stuck, a Jew is sent. You are there because you have to be there. The lesson, (צו, אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְיִשְׁלְחוּ מִן-הַמַּחֲנֶה, כָּל-צָרוּעַ). Klal Yisrael is sending him for a Toeles (a purpose). That is the way it is for a Metzora. It is in the Parsha of the Degalim. It is in the Parsha of where people belong. That is what is says in the Divrei Yoel.

Moving on to our Parsha, the Parsha of Yetizas Mitzrayim. (כִּי בָּדַד תִּזְקָה,) We find that Moshe Rabbeinu is told that after Makkas Bechorim Klal Yisrael will be Yishalcheim and Yigarsheim. If you look at Rashi carefully you will see that (כִּי בָּדַד תִּזְקָה, וְיִשְׁלַחְתֶּם) Rashi says is the Yad Hashem and (וּבָבֶד תִּזְקָה, וְיִגְרַשְׁתֶּם) is the Yad of Pharaoh. Which fits so beautifully as follows. (וּבָבֶד תִּזְקָה, וְיִגְרַשְׁתֶּם מֵאֶרְצוֹ). Pharaoh is going to chase Klal Yisrael out of Mitzrayim. You don't belong here. You should know, when a Goyish King chases Yidden out of a city or out of a country that is a Yad down here. (כִּי בָּדַד תִּזְקָה, וְיִשְׁלַחְתֶּם) HKB"H's Yad is sending Klal Yisrael for a purpose. (כִּי בָּדַד תִּזְקָה, וְיִשְׁלַחְתֶּם, וּבָבֶד תִּזְקָה, וְיִגְרַשְׁתֶּם). Says the Medrash, Yad Chazakah L'maylah and Yad Chazakah L'mata. One from upstairs and one down here. Sometimes it seems that you are being sent somewhere you don't want to be. There is a Yad L'mayla doing the sending. What a beautiful Vort and a beautiful insight.

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Parsha TAZRIA – METZORAH Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The laws regarding ritual purity and the metaphysical disease of tzorasat, which by the way is not the medically recognized disease of leprosy, affect three categories of human life and society – the human body, clothing and houses. These three areas of human societal existence are the basic building blocks of civilization and society generally. They are the most vital and at the same time the most vulnerable areas of our existence. And it is apparent that the Torah wishes us to be aware of this fact.

Health of body is a necessary precedent to most cases of human accomplishment. Not many of us are able to rise over illness, pain and/or

chronic discomfort on a regular and permanent basis. Medical science recognizes that our mood and our mind affect our physical state of wellbeing. The Torah injects into this insight that our soul also has such an effect as well.

The rabbis specifically found that the distress caused to one's soul by evil speech, slander and defamation reflects itself physically in the disease of tzsorat. In biblical times, hurting other human beings by the intemperate use of one's tongue, had clear physical consequences that served as a warning of the displeasure of one's soul at such behavior. The human body is our mainstay. It is also the most fragile and vulnerable to decay and discomfort. It is therefore only logical that it is in this area of our existence that the possibility of tzsorat lurks and lingers.

Clothing represents our outer representation of ourselves to the society around us. Originally, as described in the Torah itself, clothing was meant to shelter us from the elements and to provide us with a sense of privacy and modesty in covering our nakedness. As humanity evolved and developed, clothing became a statement of personality and even of the mental and spiritual nature of the person.

Clothing also became an instrument of hubris, competitiveness and even of lewdness. It also became vulnerable to the distress of the soul over its use for essentially negative purposes. And again in biblical times the angst of the soul translated itself into tzsorat that affected clothing directly.

And finally tzsorat was able to invade the physical structure of one's own dwelling place. One is entitled to live in a comfortable and attractive home. All of the amenities of modern life are permitted to us. But the Psalmist warned us that we should be careful not to make our homes our "graves." Homes are by their very nature temporary and transient places.

Our father Avraham described himself as a wandering itinerant on this earth. Again, as in all areas of human life, the Torah demands of us perspective and common sense when dealing with our homes. We gawk with wonder when visiting palaces and mansions of the rich and famous yet our inner self tells us that this really is not the way that we wish to live. The vulnerability of homes and houses to tzsorat is obvious to all.

In Jewish life, less is more.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

from: Mordechai Tzion toratravaviner@yahoo.com

to: ravaviner@yahoogroups.com

<http://www.ravaviner.com/>

Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample: Which is Greater - The Redemption from Egypt or Our Redemption?

Q: Which is greater: The Redemption from Egypt or our current Redemption, with our return to Eretz Yisrael, the establishment of the State of Israel, our military victories, etc.?

A: Our Redemption, for five reasons: 1. The Redemption from Egypt was after 210 years, while our Redemption was after 2000 years. 2. The Redemption from Egypt was from one country, while our Redemption was from the four corners of the world. 3. The Redemption from Egypt was with the aid of Moshe Rabbenu, while our Redemption was without the aid of Moshe Rabbenu. 4. The Redemption from Egypt was with revealed miracles, while our Redemption was with hidden miracles. 5. The Redemption from Egypt was followed by destruction of the Beit Ha-Mikdash (and another Exile), while our Redemption will not be followed by destruction.

Muscle Man

Q: My friend is always lifting weights so he'll have big muscles. He says he wants to show off. How should I relate to this?

A: This is dangerous arrogance. Have pity on him.

Ariel Sharon

Q: How do we relate to Ariel Sharon? A: It is complex. He had both good and bad traits.

Q: Which were the majority? A: Certainly the good. He saved us during the Yom Kippur War.

Q: And relating to Yesha, what were the majority? A: Also the good. He helped settled 400,000 Jews in Yesha and destroyed the homes of 10,000 there in Gush Katif. By the way, how others related to him was not always proper, since they saw him only as a medium for achieving their goals. They used him when it was beneficial. Someone once said to him jokingly: You are the Messiah's donkey. He replied: Beware, a donkey sometimes kicks...

Honoring Torah Scholars

Q: It is permissible to say out of respect for a Rav that he is cute and sweet?

A: Certainly not. One must use respectful words.

To be Charedi

Q: Why does Ha-Rav cite Charedi sources in his Teshuvot? Should we be Charedim?! A: There is one Torah. Furthermore, what is someone who is Charedi? One who is particular to observe "light" Mitzvot in the same manner of as "severe" ones out of the fear of Heaven, and who learns Torah during all of his free time. If so, everyone should be Charedi. And one should also be particular regarding the severe Mitzvah of the revival of Am Yisrael in its Land. One should therefore be more Charedi than the Charedim.

Name of Mother in Ketubah

Q: The groom is insisting that his mother's name is also written in the Ketubah. I tried to convince him otherwise but to no avail. Should I refuse to perform the wedding? A: He errs, since we do not make such changes, but do not fight with him over it.

Date of Wedding

Q: Is there a problem with getting married on the same date that my parents got divorced? A: There is no problem. On the contrary, it is a spiritual repair.

From: Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Parsha List

<ohrtorahstone@otsny.org>

"Shabbat Shalom" – Tazria/Metzora 5777

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Weekly Parsha Column, Torah Insights

Efrat, Israel — "And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." [Lev. 12:3]

The mitzvah of circumcision in the portion of Tazria appears in the midst of the discussion of the impure and pure periods immediately following childbirth. Furthermore, our Sages specifically derive from this ordinance that the ritual of circumcision overrides Shabbat: "On the eighth day, [the child's] foreskin shall be circumcised – even if it occurs on Shabbat" [Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 132a]. Why express this crucial significance of circumcision – its precedence even over Shabbat – within the context of ritual impurity? What is the connection?

Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel links the two issues by interpreting: "And on the eighth day, when [Biblically] 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, 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 toward one another [Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Nidda 31b].

I would like to suggest an additional 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). Obviously this restriction demands a great deal of self-control and inner discipline. The major symbol that 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 even 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]

I see in the words of the midrash as well as the context of the commandment a profound message: the human being is part of the physical creation of the world, a world that is 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*.

However, 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 as well as during the painful anguished period preceding the moment when she hears the cry of a healthy, living baby.

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 (*tuma*) there is also ritual purity (*tahara*). Hence, the very human life that emerges from the mother's womb brings in its wake not only the brush with death, *tuma*, but also the hope of new life, *tahara* – and while the *tuma* is for seven days, the *tahara* is 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 is the message that 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 gartel, or belt) 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 the meaning behind the principle that circumcision overrides Shabbat: the Sabbath testifies to God's creation of the world – impressive and inspiring, but deliberately imperfect. Circumcision testifies to the human being's challenge to redeem himself and perfect the world. Indeed, circumcision overrides Shabbat.

Shabbat Shalom

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

to: weekly@ohr.edu

subject: Torah Weekly

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Tazria - Metzora

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

For the week ending 29 April 2017 / 3 Iyyar 5777

Insights

Foggy Spectacles

"When a leprous blemish will be in a person he shall be brought to the kohen" (13:9)

A well-known *ba'al mussar* (ethics master) once began a *shiur* thus:

"I was seventeen the first time I learned *Orchot Tzadikim*. The first two chapters of *Orchot Tzadikim* deal with the negative aspects of the character trait known as "pride". I thought to myself, 'Well, I don't have that problem. I can skip to chapter three.' It took me until I was twenty-three to realize what a true *ba'al ga'avah* (haughty person) I was."

Truth be told, we are all legends in our own lunchtimes, so to speak. "The world is full of flawed individuals — but I'm not one of them. It's true I'm not perfect, but there's really nothing wrong with me."

And it's not because we are lying to ourselves. We genuinely believe that we're okay. It's just that our eyesight fails when turned inward. Thus, if we really want to know what's wrong with us we have to trust constructive criticism from those who know and care for us.

"When a leprous blemish will be in a person, he shall be brought to the kohen."

The verse doesn't specify what kind of "person" we are referring to here. Meaning, when a leprous blemish will be in a person — even if that person himself is a kohen — it shall be brought to the kohen, for he himself will never see the blemish.

Source: *Talelei Orot*

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http://www.ou.org/torah/author/Rabbi_Dr_Tzvi_Hersh_Weinreb

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

OU Torah

Going At It Alone

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

"No man is an island." "It takes a village."

These are just some of the clichés that are used to convey the importance of social groups, of the realization that people cannot "go at it alone".

But just as it is vital that each of us learns that we are ultimately limited in what we can accomplish by ourselves, it is equally vital that we learn of the benefits of occasional solitude and of the need to sometimes just be alone.

In this week's double Torah portion, *Tazria-Metzora*, we read at length and in great detail about an individual who is afflicted by a condition known as *tzora'at*, often translated as leprosy. It is a condition which is characterized by specific discolorations of the skin and which is understood by our sages to be the consequence of immoral behavior, particularly malicious gossip.

The Torah prescribes that such an individual rend his clothes and let his hair grow. He is considered ritually unclean, and "... he shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside that camp." (Leviticus 13:46)

Opinions vary as to why he must be removed from society. Some say simply that he is quarantined because his condition is contagious. Others insist that since his misdeeds caused harm to others, he must be punished by living apart from others.

I prefer, however, the view that believes that a period of solitude is imposed upon this individual to afford him an opportunity to think, to reconsider his actions, and to resolve to live a new moral life style. He is afforded the social isolation necessary for thoroughgoing introspection, a chance to think for himself.

There is a lesson here about the benefits of solitude that is of renewed relevance in our day and age.

The most recent edition of *The American Scholar* (Spring 2010) carries an essay by William Deresiewicz which he delivered to the plebe class at the United States Military Academy at West Point in October of last year. The essay is entitled "Solitude and Leadership."

Mr. Deresiewicz eloquently conveys the message to these future military leaders that leadership demands a mindset which can only come about with frequent and sustained periods of solitude.

He emphasizes the importance of thinking and writes, "Thinking means concentrating on one thing long enough to develop an idea about it."

He further emphasizes the importance of concentrating, and writes that it means “gathering yourself together into a single point rather than letting yourself be dispersed everywhere into a cloud of electronic and social input.” Ralph Waldo Emerson made Mr. Deresiewicz’s point long ago when he said, “He who should inspire and lead his race must be defended from traveling with the souls of other men, from living, breathing, reading, and writing in the daily, time-worn yoke of their opinions.”

These opinions of a famous 19th century essayist and one of his contemporary counterparts stress and amplify a message implicit in this week’s Torah portion. The message is that time by oneself, reflecting and engaging in serious introspection, is an essential component of self improvement and a prerequisite not only for membership in society, but for leadership of society.

Jewish sources go much further than Emerson and Deresiewicz. The latter restrict their insightful comments to the importance of solitude in everyday, mundane affairs. Our tradition goes beyond that and teaches that solitude is necessary for spiritual growth and for religious leadership.

The sages of the Talmud insist upon the necessity of cheshbon hanefesh self-reckoning. The Jewish ethical treatises of medieval times recommend that one regularly withdraw from society to engage in such self reckoning. Chassidim, and most particularly the followers of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, daily engage in periods of hitbodedut, solitary contemplation. The secular writers quoted above are helpful in that they make it clear that solitude need not entail mystical practices or spiritual techniques. Rather, solitude provides an opportunity for thinking on one’s own and for concentrating deeply without the undue influences of one’s social surround. I personally am convinced that occasional solitude would be a healthy antidote to the blind conformity which is imposed upon all of us by our contemporary world.

Once again, the Torah, in the midst of a passage which seems most out of tune with modernity, gives us a lesson essential for coping with modernity.

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from: **Shabbat Shalom** <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

reply-to: **shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org**

OU Torah

Is there such a thing as Lashon Tov? -

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The Sages understood tsara’at, the theme of this week’s parsha, not as an illness but as a miraculous public exposure of the sin of lashon hara, speaking badly about people. Judaism is a sustained meditation on the power of words to heal or harm, mend or destroy. Just as God created the world with words, so we create, and can destroy, relationships with words.

The rabbis said much about lashon hara, but virtually nothing about the corollary, lashon tov, “good speech”. The phrase does not appear in either the Babylonian Talmud or the Talmud Yerushalmi. It figures only in two midrashic passages where it refers to praising God. But lashon hara does not mean speaking badly about God. It means speaking badly about human beings. If it is a sin to speak badly about people, is it a mitzvah to speak well about them? My argument will be that it is, and to show this, let us take a journey through the sources.

In Mishnah Avot, Ethics of the Fathers (2:10-11), we read the following: Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh.

He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin.

Elazar ben Arakh: an ever-flowing spring.

However, the practice of Rabban Yochanan in praising his disciples seems to stand in contradiction to a Talmudic principle:

Rav Dimi, brother of Rav Safra said: Let no one ever talk in praise of his neighbour, for praise will lead to criticism. (Arakhin 16a)

Rashi gives two explanations of this statement. Having delivered excessive praise [yoter midai], the speaker himself will come to qualify his remarks, admitting for the sake of balance that the person of whom he speaks also has faults. Alternatively, others will point out his faults. For Rashi, the crucial consideration is, is the praise judicious, accurate, true, or it is overstated? If the former, it is permitted; if the latter, it is forbidden. Evidently Rabban Yochanan was careful not to exaggerate.

Rambam, however, sees matters differently. He writes: “Whoever speaks well about his neighbour in the presence of his enemies is guilty of a secondary form of evil speech [avak lashon hara], since he will provoke them to speak badly about him” (Hilkhot Deot 7:4). According to the Rambam the issue is not whether the praise is moderate or excessive, but the context in which it is delivered. If it is done in the presence of friends of the person about whom you are speaking, it is permitted. It is forbidden only when you are among his enemies and detractors. Praise then becomes a provocation, with bad consequences.

Are these merely two opinions or is there something deeper at stake? There is a famous passage in the Talmud which discusses how one should sing the praises of a bride at her wedding:

Our Rabbis taught: How should you dance before the bride [i.e. what should one sing]?

The disciples of Hillel hold that at a wedding you should sing that the bride is beautiful, whether she is or not. Shammai’s disciples disagree. Whatever the occasion, don’t tell a lie. “Do you call that a lie?” the Hillelites respond. “In the eyes of the groom at least, the bride is beautiful.”

What’s really at stake here is not just temperament – puritanical Shammaites versus good-natured Hillelites – but two views about the nature of language. The Shammaites think of language as a way of making statements, which are either true or false. The Hillelites understand that language is about more than making statements. We can use language to encourage, empathise, motivate and inspire. Or we can use it to discourage, disparage, criticise and depress. Language does more than convey information. It conveys emotion. It creates or disrupts a mood. The sensitive use of speech involves social and emotional intelligence. Language, in J. L. Austin’s famous account, can be performative as well as informative.

The argument between Hillel and Shammai is similar to that between Rambam and Rashi. For Rashi, as for Shammai, the key question about praise is: is it true, or is it excessive? For Rambam as for Hillel, the question is: what is the context? Is it being said among enemies or friends? Will it create warmth and esteem or envy and resentment?

We can go one further, for the disagreement between Rashi and Rambam about praise may be related to a more fundamental disagreement about the nature of the command, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). Rashi interprets the command to mean: do not do to your neighbour what you would not wish him to do to you (Rashi to Sanhedrin 84b).

Rambam, however, says that the command includes the duty “to speak in his praise” (Hilkhot Deot 6:3). Rashi evidently sees praise of one’s neighbour as optional, while Rambam sees it as falling within the command of love.

We can now answer a question we should have asked at the outset about the Mishnah in Avot that speaks of Yochanan ben Zakkai’s disciples. Avot is about ethics, not about history or biography. Why then does it tell us that Rabban Yochanan had disciples? That, surely, is a fact not a value, a piece of information not a guide to how to live.

However, we can now see that the Mishnah is telling us something profound indeed. The very first statement in Avot includes the principle: “Raise up many disciples.” But how do you create disciples? How do you inspire people to become what they could become, to reach the full measure of their potential? Answer: By acting as did Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai when he praised his students, showing them their specific strengths.

He did not flatter them. He guided them to see their distinctive talents. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the “well that never loses a drop”, was not creative but he had a remarkable memory – not unimportant in the days before the Oral Torah was written in books. Elazar ben Arakh, the “ever-flowing spring,” was creative, but needed to be fed by mountain waters (years later he separated from his colleagues and forgot all he had learned).

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai took a Hillel-Rambam view of praise. He used it not so much to describe as to motivate. And that is lashon tov. Evil speech diminishes us, good speech helps us grow. Evil speech puts people down, good speech lifts them up. Focused, targeted praise, informed by considered judgment of individual strengths, and sustained by faith in people and their potentiality, is what makes teachers great and their disciples greater than they would otherwise have been. That is what we learn from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

So there is such a thing as lashon tov. According to Rambam it falls within the command of “Love your neighbour as yourself.” According to Avot it is one way of “raising up many disciples.” It is as creative as lashon hara is destructive.

Seeing the good in people and telling them so is a way of helping it become real, becoming a midwife to their personal growth. If so, then not only must we praise God. We must praise people too.

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>

reply-to: ryfrand@torah.org,

to: ravfrand@torah.org

subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha

Torah.org

Rav Yissocher Frand - Parshas Tazria Metzora

A Shmoozer Can Also Be Meticulous About the Laws of Lashon Hara.

The Torah describes the procedure that is to be followed when the healed Metzora completes his period of seclusion: “The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, pure birds, cedar wood, a crimson tongue of wool, and hyssop” [Vayikra 14:4]. The Korban that the Metzora brings when he finishes his period of tumah is a unique type of sacrifice. Rashi comments on the fact that birds are uncharacteristically the key component of the metzora’s offering: This is because lashon hara [evil speech] is the cause of the negaim [skin blemishes]. Lashon hara is loose speech, a kind of thoughtless chirping on the part of the person. The symbolism of the birds is that these creatures too constantly utter chirping sounds with their voices. Therefore, the Kapara [atonement] for the Metzora is bringing birds. As a moral lesson for one who “chirped too much” he symbolically uses incessantly chirping creatures in his atonement ritual.

What does the Metzora do with these two birds? “...the one bird shall be slaughtered into an earthenware vessel over spring water. The live bird, he shall take it and the cedar wood and the crimson tongue of wood and the hyssop, and he shall dip them and the live bird into the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the spring water. Then he shall sprinkle seven times upon the person being purified from the tzara’as; he shall purify him, and he shall set the live bird free upon the open field” [Vayikra 14:5-7]. Essentially, he slaughters one of the birds and then dips the other bird into the blood along with the accompanying materials, and then sends it away.

What is the symbolism here? Why does he not slaughter both birds, as we find with most other bird sacrifices? Here instead of slaughtering the second bird, he sends it free. What is the meaning of this?

The Kli Yakar alludes to an answer, but I saw an elaboration of the idea expressed in the Kli Yakar in a sefer called Avir Yosef. As we well know, the Chofetz Chaim “wrote the book” on Lashon Hara. He resurrected and resuscitated awareness and observance of the laws of Lashon Hara in Klal Yisrael with his sefer Shmiras HaLashon.

What type of personality did the Chofetz Chaim’s have? Was the Chofetz Chaim a big schmoozer or a person who tended not to talk a lot? We might assume that the Chofetz Chaim, who was so meticulous about the observance of Shmiras HaLashon, was not a big talker. However, those who knew him — and there are still people alive today who remember the Chofetz Chaim — testify to the well documented fact that he was a very big talker. He used to schmooze with people; he would talk a lot with visitors.

Why did he do that? The answer is that the Chofetz Chaim was trying to tell us something about Lashon Hara. A person does not have to be a “Silent Sam” to be meticulous about the laws of gossip and tale bearing. A person can be a talkative person, a person can be a friendly person, a person can be engaged with people and spend time with people and still carefully avoid any speech which is inappropriate according to Torah law.

In order to make this point that a person can be a conversationalist and a raconteur and yet be fully compliant with the Halachos of Lashon Hara, the Chofetz Chaim went out of his way to participate in conversation and social interaction.

The Kli Yakar says that this too is the message of the two birds. He slaughters one and sends the other away. The one that he slaughters symbolizes Lishna Bisha — evil speech that was spoken in the past. The only solution for one who is engaged in such toxic conversation is Shechitah — such a bird must be eradicated. The bird that lives on represents Lishna Tova — good speech, constructive speech, friendly speech. The Torah’s counsel to be observant in matters of Lashon Hara is not to become silent. A person needs to learn how to talk, but how to talk correctly. The message of the live bird that he sends away corresponds to the “good chirping” that a person is capable of and that a person should attempt to engage in. The trait of “chirping” does not need to be “killed”. We can enhance, improve, and channel it. This is the message of the slaughtered bird and the bird sent away on the open field.

Rav Asher Weiss in his Minchas Asher on Chumash uses this idea to answer a question that everyone asks.

In a very famous Medrash, a peddler came to town and announced, “Who wants life? Who wants life?” Everyone heard that a new peddler in town was selling an elixir of life and they flocked around him to inquire about his wares. He got up on a chair and recited the verse from Tehillim: “Who is the man who desires life who loves days of seeing good? Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.” [Tehillim 34:13-14]. The Medrash says that Rav Yannai was there and he was so amazed from this peddler and the novel idea he taught. The peddler’s words completely enamored him.

Everyone asks the same question: What did the peddler say that Rav Yannai did not already know? The peddler merely quoted verbatim a couple of psekum from Tehillim! He did not elaborate on the verses nor did he provide any new insight into their interpretation. What was so impressive to Rav Yannai?

The Minchas Asher suggests that the chiddush is not what the peddler said; the chiddush is who said it! Peddlers of old not only sold goods and peddled wares. They were the classic gossipmongers. In fact, when the Torah tells us not to speak Lashon Hara, the language it uses is Lo Telech Rachil b’Amecha — literally, do not go as a peddler in your nation! The way the peddler business used to work in Talmudic times is that the peddler would go from city to city and from house to house and he would garner pieces of information. He would garner pieces of dirt about everyone in town and then he would spread the tales of gossip from house to house and from town to town. This is how he would find favor with the people and have them welcome him into their homes and communities so he could ultimately sell them his material wares.

The chiddush of this peddler is that he was a peddler and yet he was meticulous about the laws of Lashon Hara. He did go from town to town and he did pick up pieces of information and he did have friendly conversation

with his customers, but he did not engage in lashon hara. Indeed, he preached against it!

The chiddush was that he was like the Chofetz Chaim — a talker, a schmoozer, but not a baal lashon hara. There is lishna bisha [evil talk] that needs to be slaughtered and there is lishna tava [good talk] that needs to be kept alive.

“They Shall Not Die As A Result of Their Impurity”

In conclusion, I will share a brief homiletic insight from Chapter 15 Verse 31: “You shall separate the Children of Israel from their impurity; and they shall not die as a result of their impurity...” There is a message in this pasuk for all rabbis and for all teachers and indeed for all parents.

Any person who has been in the rabbinate or who has been in positions of spiritual leadership — a Rebbe, a teacher, a parent — knows the feeling: We talk, we give mussar to people, we say over what we feel are inspirational messages — until we are blue in the face — and ostensibly our words have no impact, whatsoever.

Yeshiva mashgichim have been telling students from time immemorial that they need to get up for davening in the morning and be on time for minyan but unfortunately their words are not always accepted. Rabbanim give mussar about all sorts of things and people often persist in doing what they have always been doing. How many Rabbis have spoken out time after time that people should not talk during davening? Yet people continue to talk during davening. How many times as parents have we had the experience that we tell something to our kids — repeatedly — to no avail? Apparently, it just goes in one ear and out the other.

That is what this pasuk is teaching us. “You shall separate the Children of Israel from their impurity.” You need to give mussar. You need to preach. You need to tell them what is right and what is wrong, to stay away from things that defile. Ostensibly, it has no impact. “And they shall not die as a result of their impurity.” However, one day, one place and one time — maybe when they are very old, may even when they are about to die — when they die, they will not die of their impurity. Why did they not die of their impurity? It is because your words did make an impact.

If you have been in the rabbinate or the teaching business or even the parent business, you see that sometimes you preach and preach and preach and maybe it takes twenty, thirty, or forty years but when people get older they may indeed admit, “You know, what you told me way back when made a lot of sense.” As Mark Twain said, “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. However, when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.”

This is the message of the pasuk. You have to preach and you have to give mussar (“You shall separate the Children of Israel from their impurity”). Do not think it has no impact. Maybe not now but one day they will change (“They will not die in their state of impurity.”)

*Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org
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from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com

subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

ravkooktorah.org

Rav Kook Torah

Tazria/Metzora: Purifying Time and Soul

The Torah discusses various types of tum'ah (ritual impurity), the most prominent being tzara'at, a skin affliction similar to leprosy. Purification from these forms of impurity includes immersion in a mikveh (ritual bath) or natural spring. Immersion alone, however, is not sufficient; even after immersing, the individual remains impure until the start of the evening. “The sun sets and then he is ritually clean. He may then eat the sacred offerings that are his portion.” (Lev. 22:7)

Waiting until the Day is ‘Clean’

Curiously, the Talmud (Berachot 2a) interprets this verse in a forced fashion: “The sun sets and then it” — the day — “is clean” (i.e., finished). The Sages explained that the day must be completely over before the individual may partake of his offering.

Why not understand the verse literally: when the sun sets, the person is ritually clean? Why emphasize that the day must be ‘clean’?

According to Maimonides in his Guide for the Perplexed (III: 47), different forms of tum'ah correspond to various flawed character traits, erroneous beliefs, and impure acts. The Sages wrote that tzara'at, for example, is the result of slander and haughtiness. It is logical, then, that the various stages of purification — immersion in a spring or mikveh, waiting until nighttime, and bringing an offering — will be connected to the correction of these faults.

Two Aspects to Repair

The Talmud refers to two levels of purification: purifying the day (“tehar yoma”), and purifying the individual (“tehar gavra”). What is the difference between the two?

Our goal in life should be to grow spiritually and become closer to our Creator. When we sin, we stray from our overall objective. We have also misused time that could have been utilized for spiritual growth. A full life is one in which all of the days have been employed towards one's principal objective. Abraham, the Torah tells us, was ba bayamim, “well advanced in days” (Gen. 24:1). His days and years were full and complete, wholly occupied with spiritual pursuits.

When we stray from our spiritual aspirations, we need to make two distinct efforts in order to return to our original path. If I were to upset a friend, I would first need to correct my hurtful behavior. However, that alone would be insufficient to restore the friendship to its former state. The relationship will remain fragile until I have made an additional effort to rebuild the ties of friendship and affection.

The first stage — correcting the faulty behavior or flawed character trait — is analogous to the cleansing action of immersion in water. We immerse ourselves in the mikveh, leaving behind negative traits and flawed deeds. As we immerse ourselves in spiritual repair, we restore to the dimension of time its original purity. The day has not been lost to sin. With the setting of the sun, we begin a new day and a new start. This is the first level of purification, what the Sages called tehar yoma. The day has been purified; we have rectified the dimension of time.

Yet, we have not completely regained our previous state of purity. We still need to restore our former closeness to God. This is achieved through the final stage of purification: “he may then eat the sacred offerings.” With renewed desire to be close to God, we bring an offering. The offering (in Hebrew, korban, from the root karav, to draw near) enables us to draw closer to our Maker with awe and love. At this point, we repair our relationship with God. Not only has the element of time been rectified, we too have become cleansed and renewed. This is the level of tehar gavra, when the individual is fully purified, and his errors are transformed into merits.

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from: Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>

to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com

Must I Keep the Mohel?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Since the beginning of parshas Tazria discusses the mitzvah of bris milah, it is certainly an appropriate week to discuss:

Case #1:

A Case of Mistaken Identity

Yehudit and Yehuda Newparents decided which mohel they intended to employ, but did not know his telephone number. At the hospital, they asked someone for his phone number, and called to make arrangements. However, when the mohel came to check the baby before the bris, Yehuda realized that

this was not the mohel he had intended to use. Could he now use a different mohel?

Case #2:

Billy Rubin's Bilirubin

Zev Rubin, whose old friends still sometimes call him Billy, asked Reb Leizer Izmil to be the mohel for his son's bris. However, Billy Rubin's newborn son had a borderline high bilirubin count, high enough that some mohalim would postpone the bris, whereas others would consider it safe. Billy's posek ruled that the bris should be performed on the eighth day, but Reb Leizer would not perform the bris until the count drops. May Billy forgo Leizer the razor and instead ask a different mohel to perform the bris on the eighth day?

Case #3:

The Busy Mohel

Avraham has used Reb Moshe as the mohel for his previous sons, and would like to use him for his newborn. However, Reb Moshe is already booked by other families and will not be available until later in the day than Avraham would like to make his bris. Should he wait for Reb Moshe, or use a different mohel who is available earlier?

Introduction:

Although all the names have been changed, each of the above situations is an actual case that I know of. The critical issue in all these questions is whether someone who asked one mohel to perform his son's bris may then ask a different mohel to do so. Of course, the immediate question is why should one not be able to do so? Isn't one permitted to switch one's lawyer, doctor, or accountant, if one chooses?

To introduce our discussion, let me chronicle an event that transpired almost eight hundred years ago. A newborn baby was ill, and it was obvious that the bris would be delayed for several weeks. The father promised the local mohel, Rabbi Levi, that he would be honored with performing the bris. Rabbi Levi, who was responsible for certain regional communal matters, left on a trip to attend to these responsibilities, assuming that he would return by the time the baby would be ready for the bris. Thank G-d, the baby recuperated faster than expected, and now the father wanted to perform the bris, but had no way of reaching Rabbi Levi. (Remember that cellular phone technology was not that advanced in the thirteenth century.) In order to guarantee that his son's bris would take place as soon as possible, the father brought a mohel from a different town, promising the second mohel that he would perform the bris whether the first mohel returned on time or not. On the day that the baby was healthy enough for the bris, both mohalim showed up in town, and the question was: Which mohel should be awarded with the mitzvah, the mohel who traveled specially for the bris, or the mohel who had earlier been promised the mitzvah?

Which Mohel should I use?

This question was referred to the Maharam of Rottenberg (the famed "captive rabbi," who was the posek hador at the time) for a decision. The Maharam quotes Rabbeinu Tam who ruled that once someone asked a mohel to perform a bris, he may not switch and offer the mitzvah to another mohel. Before explaining the basis for Rabbeinu Tam's ruling, we need to introduce two halachic factors:

Don't Charge for a Mitzvah

According to halacha, one may not charge for performing a mitzvah (Bechoros 29a; Nedarim 37a). (One may charge for the loss of time from one's livelihood that resulted. A full treatment of this topic is beyond the focus of this article.) Therefore, since a mohel may not charge to perform milah, he is performing it for the sake of the mitzvah. (The prevalent custom is to provide the mohel with a gift for his services.)

Keep your Word

The Torah says *Moznei tzedek, avnei tzedek, eifas tzedek, vehin tzedek yihyeh lachem* -- You must have honest weights, honest weighing stones, an honest eifah [a unit of dry measure] and an honest hin [a unit of liquid measure] (Vayikra 19:36). The word used by the Torah, *hin*, however, is

similar to the word *hein*, which means yes. The Gemara understands this to allude to: Your "yes" should always be honest, meaning that one should be true to one's word, even when no contract was created (Bava Metzia 49a). This is an extension of the idea conveyed by the Navi: *She'eiris Yisrael lo yaasu avlah velo yedabru chazav velo yimatzei befihem leshon tarmis* -- The remnant of Israel does not perform corruptive deeds and does not speak falsehood, nor will you find in their mouths a deceptive tongue (Tzefaniah 3:13). This concept is often shortened in halachic reference to *She'eiris Yisrael lo yaasu avlah*, and refers to the ethical responsibility to be true to one's word.

The Gemara's conclusion is that someone who offered a second person a small gift is required to be true to his word. Nevertheless, should the giver renege, the proposed recipient has no claim. A Jew is obligated to keep his word, but this mitzvah does not create a liability against him.

Major Gift

The halacha is different if someone promised to provide a major gift. When one offered a major gift, the potential recipient does not necessarily expect that he will receive it; it is therefore not considered a violation of halacha to reconsider what one wants to do, should circumstances change.

Changing the Mohel

Putting both ideas together, Rabbeinu Tam concludes that once I offered a mohel the opportunity to perform the mitzvah, I cannot change to a different mohel. From my perspective, choosing one mohel over another qualifies as a "small gift," that I am required to honor. As explained above, although the father may not change mohalim, should he do so, the first mohel has no claim against either the second mohel or the father, even though the father did the wrong thing by changing mohalim.

Which Mohel?

The Maharam concludes that since the first mohel has now returned, the father is required to ask him to perform the bris, since the second mohel was authorized to perform the bris only should the first mohel be unavailable (Teshuvos Maharam quoted by Beis Yosef, Yoreh Deah 264). The Gra explains that since one is not supposed to change mohalim, the second mohel is only being asked if the first mohel would not be available.

Where is Yossele?

At this point, we can address Yehudit and Yehuda Newparents's predicament, in which the mohel they had called was a perfectly competent mohel, but he was not the mohel they had intended to use. The story that happened was a bit humorous. I attended the bris of people I knew, and asked them how they knew the mohel that they had used. Yehuda told me that he would tell me the story about their choice of mohel after the bris. The Newparents had decided to use the internationally renowned "Yossele the mohel" of Yerushalayim (now, zt"l, of blessed memory), but, like most people, did not know Yossele's family name (Weisberg). Yehudit asked one of the observant nurses at the hospital if she knew the phone number of "Yossele, the mohel," and, knowing how busy Yossele can be, she immediately called and reserved Yossele. When the mohel arrived to check the baby before the bris, Yehuda realized that this was not the mohel he had expected. Before the mohel left, Yehuda asked if he had a business card, and his perusal confirmed his suspicion. Indeed they had called a mohel named Yosef, but he was not the famous "Yossele, the mohel."

Now, a bit flustered that he had arranged for an unknown mohel to circumcise his son, Yehuda made inquiries and determined that, indeed, Yosef the mohel appeared to be qualified. Still, Yehuda was faced with a halachic question. Could he change mohalim, since he had never intended to ask this Yosef to be his son's mohel?

Yehuda called his rav to ask whether he would be permitted to change the mohel. The rav ruled that although Yehuda could change the mohel, since Yosef the mohel was indeed a qualified mohel, he should not change mohalim, as this might offend the mistaken mohel.

By the way, the original Yossele the mohel wrote a four-volume encyclopedia on bris milah, called *Otzar HaBris*, in which he quotes that one

may switch to a different mohel if the second mohel is more expert or a bigger tzadik (Volume 3, page 188, quoting Migdal Oz). So, according to Yossele the mohel, the Newparents could have used Yossele the mohel instead of Yosef the mohel whom their rav told them to use. Obviously, their rav disagreed, and they did the proper thing by following his directions. Dad surprisingly shows up at his own son's bris

The Yaavetz discusses the following case: The father of the newborn is himself a mohel, but he thought that he would not be able to be at his own son's bris, and therefore arranged for a different mohel to perform the mitzvah. In the end, the father was able to attend. Is it a violation for him to perform the bris himself? The Yaavetz rules that performing the bris himself is a major gift, and that he may perform the mitzvah himself (quoted in Sefer HaBris of Rav Moshe Bunim Pirutinsky, page 4). The idea is that someone who cannot perform the mitzvah himself will anyway need to ask a mohel to perform it for him, so which mohel he chooses is a "minor" gift. However, when he is able to perform the mitzvah himself, having someone else perform it instead is the loss of a major gift on which halacha permits him to renege.

Zeide surprisingly shows up at his grandson's bris

Dovid is learning in kollel in Eretz Yisrael in an area where it is not easy to procure a mohel for a Shabbos bris. His father, who lives in America, is a mohel with a very busy practice. When Dovid's son was born on Shabbos, his father told him that he would be unable to arrive for the bris because of other commitments, so Dovid arranged for a local mohel to be available. Subsequently, Dovid's father made arrangements to come for the bris. Is Dovid permitted to switch mohalim and have his father perform the bris? The rav who ruled on this shaylah held that it is considered a fulfillment of kibud av for the baby's father to have his own father perform the bris, and therefore, switching mohalim is permitted.

Disputed Bilirubin

At this point, we can discuss Billy Rubin's bilirubin shaylah. The Gemara rules that if a baby is somewhat jaundiced, a common and not serious condition among newborns, one should delay performing the bris until the baby is well (Shabbos 134a). A dispute among contemporary rabbonim is: at what point does one consider the child to be mildly jaundiced. The diagnosis involved is based on certain physical symptoms and the measure of bilirubin in the blood. (Bilirubin is the pigment [or chemical] that causes jaundice. A higher bilirubin score results in a greater degree of jaundice.) Chassidisha rabbonim and mohalim tend to require a lower bilirubin score until they feel the child is ready for the bris, whereas Litvisha rabbonim and mohalim often feel that the threshold for safety to allow the performance of the bris is higher, and that babies whose bilirubin is in the middle range should not be deprived of having a bris in the correct time.

Billy Rubin follows Litvisha practices, but had asked a well respected chassidisha mohel, Reb Leizer, to perform the bris. A day before he was expecting the bris, the mohel examined the baby and felt that the bris should be delayed until all symptoms of jaundice disappeared.

Billy mentioned this to his posek, who was not convinced that the bris should be delayed, and instructed him to bring the baby to a different mohel, a well respected Litvisha mohel, to check whether the bris could be performed on the eighth day. The second mohel saw no problem with performing the bris on the eighth day, but to be on the safe side, had them take the baby for a bilirubin test. The second mohel felt that the results of the bilirubin test also did not warrant delaying the bris.

This placed Billy in an uncomfortable position, since his original, chosen mohel still felt that the bris should be postponed. Should Billy use a different mohel so that he can make the bris on the eighth day? Did this not make Billy violate she'eiris Yisrael lo yaaseh avlah, by going back on his word to honor Reb Leizer with wielding the razor?

The posek held that changing mohalim in order to perform the bris on the eighth day is a "major gift" for which one does not violate she'eiris Yisrael lo yaaseh avlah.

Similarly, in case #3, where the mohel who was used for the older sons will not be available until later in the day than one wants to perform the bris, I know rabbonim who ruled that this provides adequate reason to switch mohalim. Since one should perform a bris milah as early in the day as possible, because of the idea of zerizin makdimim lemitzvos, one should perform a mitzvah with alacrity, performing it with zerizus is a valid reason to switch mohalim.

Conclusion

Sometimes when a person is involved in performing a mitzvah, he forgets that other considerations, such as keeping one's promise or offending someone, may be more important. In this particular mitzvah, we see the interplay of both factors, and how the poskim of the generations dealt with these issues.
