

Shabbat Tazria

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Parasha

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Newsletter n° 419

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NEWS

BETH SHALOM, NEW YORK

It is with a great pleasure I was on Shabbat 26th of March in New York to preach, to celebrate and to support the ministry of the Beth Shalom congregation. On Friday evening we had a special worship in the regular Jewish synagogue of Merrick, NY. The Rabbi welcomed us warmly as Adventist church, After celebrating the kabbalat shabbat together the Adventist group sung several songs, then we shared a potluck together and we started to have a theological dialogue with the full Jewish congregation. The Jewish community gave us 10 questions to answer and we gave them 10 questions to answer.



It was a very interesting time. The Rabbi was so excited that he said to us that we are welcome for another dialogue together, but he said next time it would be good to focus on one or two questions. We left the synagogue very happy for this experience. On the morning we

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worshiped in Manhasset and on the afternoon we had a purim time in the Queens. One of the member of that church sent us an appreciation of our meeting, he said: "I wanted to take this time out to thank you for coming and sharing the wonderful word with us. You touched many hearts this weekend and have sparked much enthusiasm amongst the Beth Shalom family. I was only visiting my parents since I am currently on Spring Break from college, but G-d certainly sent me here to meet you and hear your word and I am grateful. I would love to invite you to speak at Brown University the next time you are in the United States. Please let me know the next time you are scheduled to return so I can work to set up an event. Thank you again and G-d bless" It is very encouraging to receive messages like this one.



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OVERVIEW

TAZRIA

LEVITICUS 12:1-13:59

The Torah commands a woman to bring a korban after the birth of a child.

A son is to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life.

The Torah introduces the phenomenon of tzara'at (often mistranslated as leprosy) — a miraculous disease that attacks people, clothing and buildings to awaken a person to spiritual failures.

A kohen must be consulted to determine whether a particular mark is tara'at or not.

The kohen isolates the sufferer for a week.

If the disease remains unchanged, confinement continues for a second week, after which the kohen decides the person's status.

The Torah describes the different forms of tzara'at. One whose tzara'at is confirmed wears torn clothing, does not cut his hair, and must alert others that he is ritually impure. He may not have normal contact with people. The phenomenon of tzara'at on clothing is described in detail.

LASHON HARA

Almost all of Parsha *Tazria* and most of the next week Parsha *Metzora* are concerned with the intricate laws of *tzora'a*. *Tzora'a* afflicted people as a consequence of having spoken *lashon hara* (Num 12).

Rabbi Zev Leff says "The Hebrew word for tongue, *lashon*, is related to *losh*, the process of mixing solids and liquids together. The tongue takes the spiritual and expresses it in the physical realm — thereby mixing spiritual and physical together."

THE NEW MOTHER

The Torah states: "The L-rd said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period. On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised.' " (Leviticus 12:1-3). The time of menstruation is called in Hebrew *Niddah*,

during that time the lady is considered unclean and must not have any intercourse with her husband for seven days.

The Bible compare the condition of a new mother to a menstruating woman, to the *niddah*, she is unclean for seven days too.

However, there is a problem, in the verse 6 the text says "When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering." (Leviticus 12:6)

The burnt offering is understandable, but why would the new mother be required to bring a sin offering? What sin did she commit? The seven days of uncleanness reminds us another period of seven days, which is called in Hebrew *Shiva* and is the period of mourning for a clothe relative. In fact in giving the same time of "mourning" during the menstruation and after the death of a relative, Judaism want to demonstrate how precious is life. Rabbi Ari Kahn says "When we consider the time of *niddah* as a type of mourning, we realize that the menstrual blood is literally representative of a life which did not come to fruition. Therefore Judaism, with its supreme value for human life, goes so far as to call upon us to respond to the loss of potential life. The Zohar's teaching thus provides insight into the essence of the laws of *niddah*, where husband and wife separate and observe their private mourning for the child that was not born.

When we look at the comments of Rashi we see in this law a connection with the seven days of the creation too. "Just as man's creation followed that of all of the animals ... in the process of creation, so these laws follow those of the animals." (Rashi 12:2)

The story of the creation gives us the narration of the first sin. "And the L-rd G-d commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'" (Gen. 2:16-17), but when Adam and Eve sinned they did not die immediately, but one of the consequences was the painful pregnancy of Eve and women "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'" (Gen 3:16). The Talmud teaches that the phrase I will greatly increase your sorrow refers to menstrual blood, the implication being that, if not for the sin of the forbidden fruit, women would not have had a menstrual cycle at all. Rather, childbirth would have been a painless result

of physical intimacy.

In a perfect world, and in the *olam habaa* world to come there will be no pain, there will be no mourning “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from G-d, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. . . . He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev. 21:1-4)

Rabbi Ari Kahn says also “the separation following childbirth and the comparison to menstruation. Both are results of the same sin, and while *niddah* responds to the potential life which was frustrated, the separation after childbirth is mourning for the necessity of the process of childbirth and for the mortality of the child born of this process. Childbirth is so completely intertwined with the sin of Eve, that a sin offering seems completely natural.”

THREE PEOPLE ARE HURT BY SLANDER

The Torah says: “The L-rd said to Moses and Aaron, “When anyone has a swelling or a rash or a bright spot on his skin that may become an infectious skin disease, he must be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons who is a priest.” (Lev. 13:1, 2) During the time of the Beth HaMikdash the Kohen (priest) would have to investigate the condition of the one afflicted with Tzara’at and declare the person spiritually “clean” or “unclean.” The laws of “Tzara’at” applied only in the days of the Holy Temple. Even though there is no temple anymore the prohibition to speak evil about people is the same because according to our sages, slander hurts three people; the one who speaks, the person who listens and the person spoken about.

LASHON HARA A GREAT SIN

The Jerusalem Talmud says that there are three sins for which a person is punished in this world and in the next — immorality, murder and idolatry — and lashon hara is equal to all three. These three sins represent the destruction of one’s physical, emotional and spiritual self.

According to Rabbi Leff the totality of the human being is destroyed by the corruption of his ultimate

distinction, his speech. Thus, one afflicted with lashon hara defiles like a corpse. He is banished from society and mourns himself, for the essence of his being has been negated.

METZORA CAUSES BAD FEELING

The Torah states regarding *tzora’as* “All the days the plague is in him ... he shall dwell alone; outside the camp shall his dwelling be” (Leviticus 13:46). Why is the person who is afflicted with *tzora’as* (who is called the *metzora*) commanded to dwell outside of the camp?

The Sages teach us in the Talmud (Erchin 16b) that since the *metzora* caused the separation of friends by speaking against others, he too should be separated from others.

Rabbi Pakouz says that this is not revenge, but to teach a lesson. Being all alone is a great distress. Everyone needs other people. While some people have a greater need to be around others, being in isolation causes much suffering. When the *metzora* spoke against a person he caused bad feelings and the isolation of that person from friends and family. By feeling the isolation himself, he will be more careful with his speech.

DAMAGE OF LASHON HARA

Our sages compare the damage inflicted through *lashon hara* to a person shooting an arrow at somebody else. As soon as the arrow leaves, the person who shot it has no control over it anymore. Similarly, as soon as a person utters negative words about others, he lost control over them and there is no telling how far they may travel and how much damage they may inflict. Once they have been aired, there is no taking them back.

CIRCUMCISION

Rabbi Marozov reminds us that the Torah tells “Abraham made a great feast on the day that Yitzchak was weaned.” The Hebrew word for “weaned” is *Higamel* which, our sages explain, also means the eighth day in which Yitzchak was circumcised. All mitzvot are Divine commandments through which we become connected to G-d. How much more so through the mitzvah of circumcision, which G-d calls, “My covenant within your flesh.”

EMBARRASSMENT

When Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber of Lubavitch was a small child the tailor once brought him a new garment for a fitting. As he was being fitted, the child put his hand in the tailor's pocket and pulled out a piece of material. The tailor became very embarrassed as it was obvious that he intended to take it for himself.

The little boy knew that he did something wrong by embarrassing the tailor. He then came to his father, Rabbi Shmuel, who was Rebbe and asked him what to do to repent for the sin of embarrassing another person.

Rabbi Shmuel asked his young son, "Who was the person you embarrassed?"

To this the boy replied, "Is it not enough that I embarrassed him, I should also mention his name and commit the sin of Lashan Hara - speaking evil of others?"

A CIRCUMCISION

A wonderful story describes how the mitzvah of circumcision saved the life of the Rambam (Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon) — Maimonides. Rambam was an advisor and personal physician to the Sultan. Several of the other ministers were jealous of Rambam. They tried to get the Sultan to find fault with him, but they weren't successful. One time, they finally convinced the Sultan that Rambam wasn't loyal. The Sultan decided that Rambam should be thrown into the pit where criminals were burned alive. The Sultan commanded the soldier in charge of the pit, that when someone comes and asks, "Did you carry out the Sultan's order?" throw him into the fiery pit!

The Sultan then called Rambam, "Go immediately to the fiery pit outside the city," he commanded, "and ask the one in charge, if he carried out the Sultan's orders?"

Rambam rushed to obey the order. On the way, a man approached him and said, "My wife had a baby boy eight days ago. I want you to perform the circumcision." Rambam replied, "It would indeed be a great honor for me and I

would love to perform this mitzvah, but I have orders from the Sultan which I must immediately fulfill." The man wasn't impressed, "You have an order from a human being, whereas the mitzvah of circumcision is an order from G-d. Which is more important?" Rambam couldn't argue with this logic. He decided to perform the circumcision.

In the meantime, one of the Sultan's ministers couldn't wait. He knew that Rambam left for the pit and figured that he must have been burned to death by now. So he went to see for himself. Arriving at the pit, he asked the one in charge, "Did you carry out the Sultan's order?" Before he even had a chance to defend himself, the evil minister was thrown into the fire. When Rambam finally arrived at the pit, he was assured that the Sultan's orders were carried out satisfactorily.

Rambam went back and reported to the Sultan that his order was carried out to the fullest. Needless to say, the Sultan was surprised to see Rambam alive. But when the Sultan found out how Rambam was saved through the performance of a mitzvah, the Sultan's respect for the Rambam increased more than before.

ANIMALS ARE NOT HUNGRY

Caesar once said to the Talmudic sage Rabbi Tanchuma, "Let us, Jews and Romans, be equal and be one nation." Implying that the Jews should become like the Romans.

Rabbi Tanchuma replied, "It is impossible for us to become like you since we are circumcised and cannot become uncircumcised! The only way is that you circumcise and become like us!"

"Your reply is good!" said Caesar. "However, the

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Matthew 5:17-26

The parasha speaks to us about the Metzora which is a punishment for speaking badly about others “*Lashon Hara*”. It was the punishment of Myriam, sister of Moses when she spoke badly about Moses’s wife “**Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite.**” (Num 12:1) and “**The anger of the L-rd burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam — leprous, like snow.**” (Num. 12:9-10). The Jewish people have always taken very seriously the sins of gossip and slander; it destroys all relationship between neighbors, friends relatives and even brothers.

Yeshua has the same concern, in his speech on the mountain, he assured first his auditors that he wants to be faithful to the law of Moses, to the Torah. “**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them**” (Matt 5:17), and then he gave some examples of his understanding of the Torah. One of the examples is about *Lashon Hara*. He said “**For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. ‘You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. ‘Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.’**” (Matt 5:20-24) What a strong statement! Yeshua invites us to “be” more righteous than the pharisees, how? In being careful in our speeches, not to speak wrongly to and about our brother, our neighbor or anyone. Thus, who among us knows that his brother has something against him? it is better to go and to reconcile with him before praying.

law is that one who outwits the king deserves to be punished by being thrown to the wild animals.” He had Rabbi Tanchuma placed in a pit with wild animals. G-d performed a miracle and the animals didn’t harm him. Everyone was amazed at this miracle.

A heathen who saw all this remarked to the Caesar, “Perhaps the animals are not hungry?”

“We will soon find out,” replied the Caesar. He ordered that the heathen be thrown into the pit with Rabbi Tanchuma. In no time, the heathen was devoured by the beasts, while Rabbi Tanchuma’s life was miraculously spared.

HAFTARAH

2 Kings 4:42-5:19

PARASHA: In the text of parasha *Tazri’a* we have the description of “*tzara’at*”. Even though the Jewish tradition says that it is not leprosy all the symptom of this sickness look like leprosy

HAFTARAH: The old Jewish tradition has seen this parasha in connection with leprosy, that’s why the corresponding text in the Haftara is about Naaman, a Syrian who got leprosy. **Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the L-RD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. (2Kings 5:1).** This man was highly appreciated, by men and by G-d. In his house was a young Jewish girl who served his wife. This young girl believed with all her heart in the G-d of Israel, she was sure that her master could be healed by G-d and his prophet. There is no discrimination of person for G-d, Jews and Gentiles are loved and receive blessings if they are faithful people. Naaman went to the king of Israel and then to the prophet Elisha. Elisha sent him to the Jordan river to be immersed seven times, then he was healed, **“his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean. He went back to the prophet and confessed that the G-d of Israel is the true G-d, “Now I know that there is no G-d in all the earth except in Israel... (2Kings 5:14; 15).** Naaman wanted to reward the prophet of G-d, but Elisha refused (2Kings 5:16).

