

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The sidrot of Tazria and Metsorah contain laws which are among the most difficult to understand. They are about conditions of "impurity" arising from the fact that we are physical beings, embodied souls, and hence exposed to (in Hamlet's words) "the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to." Though we have immortal longings, mortality is the condition of human existence, as it is of all embodied life. As Rambam explains (Guide for the Perplexed, III: 12):

We have already shown that, in accordance with the divine wisdom, genesis can only take place through destruction, and without the destruction of the individual members of the species, the species themselves would not exist permanently . . . He who thinks that he can have flesh and bones without being subject to any external influence, or any of the accidents of matter, unconsciously wishes to reconcile two opposites, namely, to be at the same time subject and not subject to change.

Throughout history there have been two distinct and opposing ways of relating to this fact: hedonism (living for physical pleasure) and asceticism (relinquishing physical pleasure). The former worships the physical while denying the spiritual, the latter enthrones the spiritual at the cost of the physical.

The Jewish way has always been different: to sanctify the physical - eating, drinking, sex and rest - making the life of the body a vehicle for the divine presence. The reason is simple. We believe with perfect faith that the G-d of redemption is also the G-d of creation. The physical world we inhabit is the one G-d made and pronounced "very good." To be a hedonist is to deny G-d. To be an ascetic is to deny the goodness of G-d's world. To be a Jew is to celebrate both creation and Creator. That is the principle that explains many otherwise incomprehensible features of Jewish life.

The laws with which the sedra begins are striking examples of this: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be teme'ah for seven days, just as she is during the time of separation when she has her period . . . Then, for thirty-three additional

days she shall have a waiting period during which her blood is ritually clean. Until this purification period is complete, she shall not touch anything holy and shall not enter the sanctuary.

If she gives birth to a girl, she shall have for two weeks the same teme'ah status as during her menstrual period. Then, for sixty-six days after that, she shall have a waiting period during which her blood is ritually clean (Vay. 12:2-5).

She then brings a burnt-offering and a sin-offering, after which she is restored to "ritual purity." What is the meaning of these laws? Why does childbirth render the mother teme'ah (usually translated as "ritually impure", better understood as "a condition which impedes or exempts from a direct encounter with holiness")? And why is the period after giving birth to a girl twice that for a boy? There is a temptation to see these laws as inherently beyond the reach of human understanding. Several rabbinic statements seem to say just this. In fact, it is not so, as Maimonides explains at length in the Guide. To be sure, we can never know - specifically with respect to laws that have to do with kedushah (holiness) and teharah (purity) - whether our understanding is correct. But we are not thereby forced to abandon our search for understanding, even though any explanation will be at best speculative and tentative.

The first principle essential to understanding the laws of ritual purity and impurity is that G-d is life. Judaism is a profound rejection of cults, ancient and modern, that glorify death. The great pyramids of Egypt were grandiose tombs. Arthur Koestler noted that without death "the cathedrals collapse, the pyramids vanish into the sand, the great organs become silent." The English metaphysical poets turned to it constantly as a theme. As T. S. Eliot wrote:

Webster was much possessed by death
And saw the skull beneath the skin . . .
Donne, I suppose, was such another . . .
He knew the anguish of the marrow
The ague of the skeleton . . .

Freud coined the word thanatos to describe the death-directed character of human life.

Judaism is a protest against death-centred cultures. "It is not the dead who praise the Lord, nor those who go down into silence" (Psalm 114) "What profit is there in my death, if I go down into the pit? Can the dust acknowledge You? Can it proclaim your truth?" (Psalm 30). As we open a sefer Torah we say: "All of you who hold fast to the Lord your G-d are alive today"

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(Deut 4:4). The Torah is a tree of life. G-d is the G-d of life. As Moses put it in two memorable words: "Choose life" (Deut. 30: 19).

It follows that kedushah (holiness) - a point in time or space where we stand in the unmediated presence of G-d - involves a supreme consciousness of life. That is why the paradigm case of tumah is contact with a corpse. Other cases of tumah include diseases or bodily emissions that remind us of our mortality. G-d's domain is life. Therefore it may not be associated in any way with intimations of death. This is how Judah Halevi explains the purity laws in his work *The Kuzari*:

A dead body represents the highest degree of loss of life, and a leprous limb is as if it were dead. It is the same with the loss of seed, because it had been endowed with living power, capable of engendering a human being. Its loss therefore forms a contrast to the living and breathing (*Kuzari*, II: 60).

The laws of purity apply exclusively to Israel, argues Halevi, precisely because Judaism is the supreme religion of life, and its adherents are therefore hyper-sensitive to even the most subtle distinctions between life and death.

A second principle, equally striking, is the acute sensitivity Judaism shows to the birth of a child. Nothing is more "natural" than procreation. Every living thing engages in it. Sociobiologists go so far as to argue that a human being is a gene's way of creating another gene. By contrast, the Torah goes to great lengths to describe how many of the heroines of the Bible - among them Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah and the Shunamite woman - were infertile and had children only through a miracle.

Clearly the Torah intends a message here, and it is unmistakable. To be a Jew is to know that survival is not a matter of biology alone. What other cultures may take as natural is for us a miracle. Every Jewish child is a gift of G-d. No faith has taken children more seriously or devoted more of its efforts to raising the next generation. Childbirth is wondrous. To be a parent is the closest any of us come to G-d himself. That, incidentally, is why women are closer to G-d than men, because they, unlike men, know what it is to bring new life out of themselves, as G-d brings life out of himself. The idea is beautifully captured in the verse in which, leaving Eden, Adam turns to his wife and calls her Chavah "for she is the mother of all life" (Gen. 3:20).

We can now speculate about the laws relating to childbirth. When a mother gives birth, not only does she undergo great risk (until recently, childbirth was a life-threatening danger to mother and baby alike). She is also separated from what until now had been part of her own body (a foetus, said the rabbis, "is like a limb of the mother" (Babylonian Talmud Gittin 23b)) and which has now become an independent person. If that is so in the case of a boy, it is doubly so in the case of a girl - who, with G-d's help, will not merely live but may herself in later years become a source of new life. At one level, therefore, the laws signal the detachment of life from life.

At another level, they surely suggest something more profound. There is a halakhic principle: "One who is engaged in a mitzvah is exempt from other mitzvot" (Babylonian Talmud Sukkah 26a). It is as if G-d were saying to the mother: for forty days in the case of a boy, and doubly so in the case of a girl (the mother-daughter bond is ontologically stronger than that between mother and son), I exempt you from coming before Me in the place of holiness because you are fully engaged in one of the holiest acts of all, nurturing and caring for your child. Unlike others you do not need to visit the Temple to be attached to life in all its sacred splendour. You are experiencing it yourself, directly and with every fibre of your being. Days, weeks, from now you will come and give thanks before Me (together with offerings for having come through a moment of danger). But for now, look upon your child with wonder. For you have been given a glimpse of the great secret, otherwise known only to G-d. Childbirth exempts the new mother from attendance at the Temple because her bedside replicates the experience of the Temple. She now knows what it is for love to beget life and in the midst of mortality to be touched by an intimation of immortality.
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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the more interesting points to note in this week's parshiyot is the fact that the Torah places the entire determination of purity or impurity in the decision making process of the kohein - the priest before whom the afflicted person appears. He alone decides the matter of the person's fate. And even though the Torah does describe for the kohein the standards and methods of diagnosis of the disease, it ultimately leaves the decision up to the kohein himself.

The kohein's determination of the matter ultimately is but a subjective one. It is the kohein who creates the impurity within the person afflicted and not, so to speak, the disease and its symptoms itself. This is truly a remarkable and necessary insight into the mystery of tzoraas particularly and halacha generally.

Though there are always rules, structures and limitations that govern the halachic decision making

process, the ultimate decision on the particular matter in question rests in the subjective mind and hands of the halachic decisor himself. So that within the objective standards set by the Torah in halachic matters and issues, there is always space left for human thought, intuition and creativity. The person, garment or building is not impure until and unless the kohein declares it to be so. It is the kohein's declaration that decides the issue and that declaration emanating from human lips like all human decisions and declarations is of necessity a subjective one.

Over all of the centuries of Jewish life and law there has been general agreement regarding the outlines - the so-called objective standards - of Jewish law, tradition and halacha. But there has always been differing opinions amongst the scholars regarding the actual details of implementing those general principles. This is because the Torah itself allows for human participation in the halachic process, for the debates and arguments that constantly construct and amplify the halachic process.

Many a great decisor and scholar in Jewish law has admitted to the fact that his intuition and/or bent of mind influenced his final decision. This thought process is then broadened further by the Jewish tradition and idea that human intuition in halachic matters is enhanced by aid from Heaven. "The Lord is with him" - the halacha is according to his opinion in all matters, is the succinct way that the Talmud phrased this idea.

A person who is devoted to Torah ideals and lives them in practice, and who is possessed of great Torah scholarship, subconsciously obtains a holy intuition that guides him in his decision making process. The Torah allows and indeed encourages human participation and its attendant subjectivity in the halachic decision making process. But it also will help that subjectivity to arrive at a correct decision on the matter at hand.

The Torah inherently promises the kohein that his subjective decision on the matter of purity or impurity at hand before him will be adjudicated correctly. This idea has been the under pinning of the halachic process of Judaism throughout the ages from the time of Sinai forward © 2012 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**T**his is the law of the Metzora... he is to be brought to the Kohen-Priest" (Leviticus 14:2).

We have been suffering these past years from the unedifying sight of politicians and civil servants exposed for serious crimes including corruption, breach of trust, sexual harassment and obstruction of justice. In

Israel, these crimes have recently extended to the prime minister's bureau, a mere 13 months after our country's president was sentenced to seven years in prison for rape and other offenses. Many of the scandals have been exposed by the newspapers, leading to public debates about the role of the media: do they interfere too much in our society, or are they a healthy watchdog? What is the Torah's view?

Metzora is usually identified as a plague of leprosy; however, many if not most biblical commentaries reject this identification. First of all, a physical illness must be attended to by a medical doctor, rather than a religious Kohen-Priest. Secondly, the walls of a house cannot be affected by a physiological disease. And thirdly, a physical plague spreads most rapidly in a crowded situation; however, no "lepers" were to be quarantined - even temporarily - in Jerusalem during the Pilgrim Festivals, precisely a time when streets overflowing with visitors would enable a physical plague to spread with wild abundance.

Hence, our Sages (most notably Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch) maintain that tzaraat was a spiritual malady, brought about by speaking or listening to slander. Rav Yisrael Salanter would often explain that the Biblical portion of Metzora follows the biblical portion of Shmini - which concludes with the forbidden animals, birds and fish - in order to teach us that what comes out of our mouths results in far greater damage than what we put into our mouths!

Maimonides lists three forms of forbidden talk: Firstly, a rohel, someone who conveys words about someone else, going from one to another saying, 'so have I heard about so and so.' Even if the words are true and even if they are not negative, the talebearer is still considered as one who destroys the world. There is a much greater transgression than this, which is called evil speech (lashon hara); this occurs when one speaks in a derogatory fashion about someone else, even if what one says is true. And thirdly, one who spreads evil falsehoods about someone else is a motzi shem ra.

Maimonides adds that, "Such evil speech will result in the death of three individuals: the one who says it, the one who listens to it, and the one whom about whom it is spoken. And the one who listens to it is worse than the one who propagates it" (Laws of Proper Ideas 7, 1-3).

From this perspective, how can we justify the publicity of the Fourth Estate, which so often judges events without even being certain of the facts? Perhaps such slanderous reporting ought to be prohibited!

I would maintain that a free press remains one of the glories of Israeli society and dare not be tampered with. Even Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan (known as the Hafetz Hayim), who wrote an important work on the evils of slander, maintains that for the common good - for example, when one is asked about the suitability of a person for a marriage (a shidduch) - one must tell the entire truth, even if the report is a negative one.

Jewish tradition encourages everyone - from childhood on - to study our legal texts, because such studies create a socially unacceptable climate for legal infraction. A dangerous culture of male, "macho" chauvinism and corruption seep into the highest echelons of our political and military elite; when such an evil spirit of acceptance of sexual harassment rears its ugly head, it is crucially important that our press step in and express public revulsion.

Obviously, they must do so responsibly - and hopefully the laws of libel protect the innocent from unfair attacks by the media. It must be remembered, however, that fame and public office engenders added responsibility - not added privilege! One dare not turn on the public in whose adulation one basked the moment it displays its disappointment and disgust. Our society owes a vote of thanks to public media, one of whose tasks must be the safeguarding of morality in the most sacrosanct corridors of power and influence © 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah tells us of the miraculous defeat of the camp of Aram. In the merit of King Yehoram's retraction from assassinating the Prophet Elisha, a prediction was made for an indescribable surplus of food during a most severe famine. Although the camp of Aram had laid a heavy siege against Israel, Hashem came to their rescue and produced deafening sounds which overtook the entire camp of Aram. Aram interpreted these sounds as coming from powerful armies who had come to the assistance of the Jewish people in their siege. Aram was so overtaken by this fear that they immediately abandoned their tents and fled for their lives, leaving behind all their provisions and possessions.

During this very same night four lepers decided to surrender to Aram in desperate hope of sparing their own lives. They were pleasantly surprised when they discovered a completely deserted camp, replete with all the needs for the famine-stricken Jewish nation. The lepers initially hoarded some of the loot but after brief consideration rushed over to the Jewish camp and informed them of their discovery. After a brief investigation of the authenticity of the story, the Jews ran to the scene and returned with an enormous surplus of food.

It is interesting to note that the heroes of this incident were lepers. The haftorah begins with, "And four men were lepers at the entrance of the city's gate." They were situated outside of the city's wall in fulfillment of the Torah's obligation of ostracizing lepers from their entire community. More interesting is our realization that this imposition became quite advantageous to them., Because they were outside of the city they had free access to the camp of Aram. This led to their attempted

surrender which yielded their unbelievable findings. All of this ultimately brought the greatest benefits to the Jewish people. This chain of events seems to suggest that the punishment of leprosy can at times be a blessing. If one properly learns his lesson, his painful experience of leprosy can prove to be a real favor from Hashem, a blessing in disguise.

Our Chazal teach us that Hashem sends leprosy to one who is stingy with his possessions and greedy for money. The four lepers in our Haftorah had a previous record of seeking and obtaining possessions in most inappropriate ways. Rashi points out that they were the family of Gechazi who had previously misrepresented the prophet Elisha in pursuit of a handsome reward. When the prophet discovered this atrocity he severely admonished his servant with strong words of rejection. After this family had been ostracized for some time they began realizing their fault and were open to rectifying it. Through Hashem's response in their darkest moment of despair they began appreciating kindness and the virtue of sharing. Their willingness to reconsider their ways resulted in a most unique opportunity to rescue the entire Jewish nation from starvation and death. They put their newly learned virtue to work and shared with everyone their unbelievable treasure. Yes, punishment is sent to us for the good and if we respond properly it can yield indescribable favor from Hashem.

This very same thought is found in today's Parsha regarding the appearance of a leprous spot on the wall of a home. The Torah says, "And I will give you a leprous spot in the house of your inherited land." (Vayikra 14:34) Our Chazal draw focus to the peculiar word, "give" rather than "send" which suggests that leprosy is some form of gift. They explain that in fact this leprous spot was a hidden blessing. Over the past forty years the Emorites buried treasures inside the walls of their homes. Knowing that the Jewish people were soon to occupy the land they permanently concealed their wealth to insure that the Jews never benefit from it. Chazal continue that Hashem sent this "gift" of leprosy to appear on the walls of these homes. During one of the purification stages the homes were torn down and a hidden treasures discovered.

This bizarre experience taught the leper a most meaningful lesson. As mentioned earlier one of the main causes of leprosy is stinginess. During the painful demolition of his contaminated home the leper began to realize and understand the extent of his inappropriate behavior. And in the midst of contemplating and reconsidering his wrong doings a treasure suddenly appeared. Hashem reminded the leper that wealth truly comes from above and inspired him to graciously share this gift with everyone in need. Although initially the leprosy was punishment for his stingy and greedy behavior it actually became a blessing in disguise. Once the leper learned to appreciate and share Hashem's wealth with others, his punishment was transformed into

a heaven-sent present. Through his leper spot, untold treasures were discovered and after properly learning his lesson the leper was eager to share his wealth with everyone he knew. © 2012 D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the double parsha of Tazria-Metzora. These parshios primarily deal with the different types of leprosy's which afflicted people, their clothing and their houses and the ensuing purification process. "Adom ki yihyeh... b'ohr b'saro l'negah tzara'as {When a man will have... in the skin of his flesh a 'negah' of leprosy}. [13:2]"

What is a 'negah'? Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the term 'negah' refers to a disease which is specifically sent by Hashem. The person affected is 'naguah', literally 'touched' by the Finger of Hashem. What is the point of this 'touch' and what can be learned from it?

The Mishna [Erchin 8B] teaches that the 'closure' period for determining if something was actually leprosy was at least one week and at most three weeks. The Talmud there explains that the minimum one-week period applies to the leprosy of man and the maximum three-week period applies to leprosy of the houses.

King David sang the praise of Hashem: "Tzidkascha k'har'ray el {Your righteousness (unbounded kindness) is like the mightiest of mountains} mishpatecha k'thome rabbah {your judgment is like the vast deep waters}. [Psalms 36:7]" Strangely, Rav Papa applies this verse to our Mishna. "Your righteousness is like the mightiest of mountains"- that refers to the one week period for man. "Your judgment is like the vast deep waters"- that refers to the three week period for houses.

Rashi explains that it's a show of kindness that man is only left 'hanging' for a week. The Maharsha explains that the kindness to man is that Hashem vents his judgments against the houses.

However, as Rav Isaac Sher asks, the entire world is saturated with Hashem's kindness and is scrutinized by Hashem's probing judgment. Is there no greater example of Hashem's kindness and judgment than leprosy!?

He explains in the following manner. The Torah is revealing to us that we are the dearest, most beloved children of Hashem. At the same time, realize that the same love that He has for you, He also has for others. We are therefore commanded not to speak badly of anyone else. Not to speak badly of one so cherished by Hashem. Our parsha shows just how careful we must treat every child of Hashem.

Raish Lakish explains that the word metzora {leper} is actually a combination of two words-motzi {brings out through speech} ra {evil}. By speaking badly

of others one's sins reach up to the heavens [Erchin 15B]. By badmouthing others one is forgetting the Father in heaven who cares so deeply for the honor of each and every one of His children. He is cutting himself off from Hashem- the well spring of life-rendering himself like dead. He therefore is banished from the company of His children. "Badad yaishav... {He must sit alone outside the camp}[13:46]."

During this time his clothing is torn and his hair and beard can't be trimmed. These laws, usually associated with a mourner, apply to him. He too is in a state of mourning. For whom does he mourn? For himself... For having been banished by his Father from associating with any of the other children. He takes this to heart. He acknowledges and comprehends that he has a Father in heaven who has boundless love for all of His children. The 'negah', the touch of Hashem's Finger, has accomplished its mission. It can now start to heal. However, the subsequent purification process is not simple at all.

The Prophet Elisha needed to go through a whole process in order to do 'tchiyas hamaisim'-bringing the dead child of the Shunamis back to life [Melachim II: Chapter 4]. So too the metzora has to go through a very elaborate process. He too is going through a process of virtual 'tchiyas hamaisim'-bringing himself back to life-reconnecting to the Source of life. The process is long and arduous. His actions distanced him to such a degree from his Father. Just a few words had such cosmic ramifications. Solitude. Humiliation. Estrangement.

Indeed, Rav Isaac Sher explains, it is hard to find a clearer example of "Mishpatecha k'thome rabbah {Your judgment is like the vast deep waters}"...

However, he explains further, there is another profound lesson to be learned here. Leprosy of houses with the walls turning colors? Leprosy of garments with white materials turning colors? This was no natural phenomenon! This only occurred in Eretz Yisroel {the Land of Israel} -- the land chosen as the 'dwelling place' of Hashem's presence. Even there, it only occurred once the land had been conquered and divided and each individual had the peace of mind to know Hashem and have His presence dwell in him. This leprosy was then a sign of this holiness distancing itself from the person's house, the person's garments and ultimately, from the person himself.

The Talmud [Yerushalmi Ta'anis 3:8] tells that troops came to the city of Levi bar Sisi. He took a Torah scroll and ascended to the roof. "Master of the universe, if I didn't fulfill anything that's written here then let the enemies enter the city!" he proclaimed. "Otherwise, let them be gone!" The enemies were not to be found. Another time, his student did the same thing. However, since he wasn't as righteous as his master and he 'bothered' Hashem to perform a miracle, his hand withered. Years later, his student's student tried the same thing. The enemies didn't disappear and his hand

didn't wither. It's no small feat to be on a level to deserve a miraculous punishment...

This is the other lesson. The flip-side of the coin. The "Tzidkascha k'har'ray el {Righteousness that is like the mightiest of mountains}." Realize the lengths that the Father is going to in order to deal with the child that bad-mouthed His other children. To try to correct and guide that child. This clearly shows the love and confidence that the Father has in that child. The same love that Hashem has for others, He also has for him. Even after his having done what he did, the Father wants nothing more than for the son to return.

What an incredible gift for a person. Such "Tzidkascha"! Within the span of a week, to recognize and learn from the mistake he made and thereby be restored from death to life. In the place of the "Mishpatecha k'thome rabbah " for his belittling one of Hashem's beloved children, comes the "Tzidkascha k'har'ray el" with the realization that he too is a beloved child of Hashem. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

“If a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy...” [Vayikra 12:2]. The sages taught us: If a woman sends her seed first she will have a boy, if the man sends his seed first, a girl will be born (Berachot 60a). Explanations for this statement in biological terms exist, but in Chassidic literature the declaration is seen as a hint of matters related to redemption.

The sages compared the relationship between the Holy One, Blessed be He, and the nation of Yisrael to the relationship between a man and a woman. Under natural circumstances the woman is the first one to accede to her mate's wishes, as is indicated by Rashi on the verse "I aroused you under the apple tree" [Shir Hashirim 8:5], as a youthful bride who arouses her husband. The desire of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is for the woman, the community of Yisrael, to awaken Him to bring the redemption. The sages derive from the verse, "It is Zion, nobody wants her" [Yirmiyahu 30:17], that it is necessary to make a demand for Zion. RADAK explains that this is the claim of the other nations - nobody demands that the land be returned to Yisrael, since even the Jews have despaired of returning. But the Holy One, Blessed be He, declares, "Return to me and I will return to you" [Malachi 3:7] - you must take the first step, and then I will complete the process.

And this is the meaning of the commentary by the sages: "I am G-d, at the proper time I will hasten it" [Yeshayahu 60:22] - If they merit it, I will hasten it but if they do not merit it, it will come at the proper time" [Sanhedrin 98a]. If the people awaken in an attempt to bring the redemption, it will indeed arrive quickly, but if they do not merit it because nobody made an effort to

bring about the redemption and the people waited for G-d to bring it about, then the redemption will come when the proper time has arrived, through a long and involved process, bit by bit.

The Talmud continues to illustrate this concept with two other verses. "Behold, with the clouds of heaven" [Daniel 7:13], with the speed of the clouds, and "a poor man riding on a donkey" [Zecharia 9:9], slowly and in a lazy way. If the people merit it - that is, when we awaken - the redemption will be like clouds. But if the people do not merit it and do not support the process, the redemption will take place - as it were - while riding on a donkey (Sanhedrin, ibid).

The sages noted another apparent contradiction. It is written, "Lift up your voice, the harbinger of Jerusalem" [Yeshayahu 40:9], using the female form, "mevasseret". But it is also written, "How pleasant are the footsteps of the harbinger on the mountains" [52:7], using the male form, "mevasser." Rashi quotes the sages about this difference: "If they have merit, they will be light as a man. If they do not have merit, they will be weak as a woman, and the steps of the Mashiach will be delayed until the appointed time."

The Seer of Lublin uses this idea to explain the comment by the sages quoted above (referenced in "Aim Habanim Semaicha" and also in "Gelilei Zahav"). If the woman, the community of Yisrael, sends her seed first, and the nation makes the effort to come to the land and settle it, she will give birth to a male - quickly and with strength. But if the man sends his seed first, when the Holy One, Blessed be He, initiates the redemption and the woman, the community of Yisrael, remains apathetic, then a female will be born - the redemption will take place in a slow process, out of weakness. This also explains why when a woman gives birth to a son her days of ritual impurity (the time of exile) are relatively short, only seven days, and the state of purity - which corresponds to the length of the redemption - lasts only thirty-three days. But if a girl is born, because the man initiated the pregnancy, the redemption will be reminiscent of a female, slowly and taking a long time. Then the time of impurity, the exile, will be fourteen days, and the time of redemption (the time of purity) will be sixty-six days.

"When they see the land destroyed and see it rebuilt within a short time, they should know that this could only happen with the help of G-d" [RADAK]. © 2012 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“And on the eighth day you shall circumcise the flesh of his foreskin" (Vayikra 12:3). The Talmud (Shabbos 132a) learns from this verse that even if the eighth day is Shabbos, the circumcision is still done. There are other mitzvos, such

as blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashana (Rosh Hashana 29b), taking a lulav on Succos (Succah 42b-43a), and reading the M'gila on Purim (M'gila 4b), that are not done on Shabbos, as a rabbinical decree was enacted outlawing these activities on Shabbos "lest he take it in his hand and bring it to an expert to learn [how to fulfill the mitzvah properly] and carries it four cubits in a public domain." There is much discussion regarding why circumcision was not included in this decree; even though we can't "make up" the shofar blowing or lulav taking missed because of the decree, we won't even delay the circumcision despite similar concerns. Numerous explanations are given, the two most straight-forward (IMO) being the second suggestion made by Tosfos (M'gila 4b) and one of Meiri's suggestions (M'gila 4b, see also Taz on O"C 588:5).

Based on the wording of the concern in the Talmud ("lest he go to an expert"), Tosfos says that it is not carrying the lulav or the shofar to actually fulfill the mitzvah that is the concern, but bringing it to an expert to learn how to do it properly. Since circumcision is only performed by an expert, the concern isn't the same, and the decree was never applied to a circumcision that occurs when the eighth day is Shabbos. [It should be noted that a similar decree was applied to someone who needed to become ritually clean in order to bring the Passover offering (P'sachim 69a), and there is no mention of an "expert" in that decree. Nevertheless, whereas in all of the previously discussed cases a mitzvah that is incumbent upon each individual is not fulfilled because of the decree, the Passover offering is not incumbent upon an individual who is ritually impure (just the opposite-he is not allowed to partake in it), so the decree prevents the mitzvah from becoming obligatory rather than prevents the fulfillment of an obligation (see Ritva on Succah 43a). That there is a fundamental difference between the decree regarding the Passover offering and the other cases is implied in the Talmud (Rosh Hashana, Succah and M'gila) where the reason for the decree in those three situations is equated, without mentioning a fourth situation.]

Meiri points out that the Talmud bases the permissibility of doing a circumcision on Shabbos when it is the eighth day (and the obligation to do so) on the wording of the verse itself; if the Torah purposely implies that we should do the circumcision on the eighth day even if it falls out on Shabbos, it would be inappropriate to make (or apply) a decree that prevents it from happening. Even though there are explicit biblical commandments to blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana and take a lulav on Succos, there is no direct implication that it should be done on Shabbos too, allowing the sages to make the decree.

It is clear from the context of the points Ritva makes (Succah 42b-43a) that he understood the decree to be based on a concern of carrying on Shabbos in general, not just when taking it to an expert. He also discusses (in Succah, M'gila and Rosh Hashana) why

circumcision was not included in the decree, differentiating between fulfilling a mitzvah on a specific day (the eighth day after birth) and doing so on a specific day of the month. The days of the month are based on the new moon, so it wasn't always known which day would be the one that the mitzvah must be fulfilled. Without a definite obligation on Shabbos to blow shofar, the concern about desecrating Shabbos was enough to make the decree. (Bear in mind that with Rosh Hashana being on the first of the month, even in Israel they weren't sure if what would have been the 30th days of Elul was really Rosh Hashana. The Talmud discusses why the decree includes not taking the lulav on Shabbos even in Israel, see Tosfos on Succah 43a d"h Inhu.) Circumcision, on the other hand, where we know exactly which day is the eighth day, was not included in this decree, as the decree was only applied to situations where the mitzvah may not be obligated, not to situations where it definitely applies.

[Although we now have a set calendar, the decree to keep two days outside of Israel (where, before the calendar was set, notice of when the new month started did not reach most) was to treat these two days as they would had they not known which day was Yom Tov. Therefore, since it is treated as if they weren't sure which day the mitzvah must be fulfilled, the decree against taking the lulav (or blowing the shofar or reading the M'gila) still applies.]

In "Iyun Haparasha" (5771), a question is posed as to why, according to Ritva, circumcision is excluded from the decree, since it is unknown at the time of the circumcision whether this infant will live for a month-and an infant that does not live for a month is not considered a full person. If the decree applies to any situation where the mitzvah is not definitely obligated, and until the infant is considered a full person we won't know whether there was an obligation to circumcise him on the eighth day, why did they allow the circumcision on Shabbos?

Meiri's approach should address this question, as the implication in the verse that a circumcision takes place on the eighth day even if it falls out on a Shabbos is enough of a reason to exclude it from the decree. The Torah knew that the eighth day comes before the infant is a month old, and yet still told us to circumcise an eight day old even if it's Shabbos! However, the question could be reversed; if we see from circumcision that we should not prohibit fulfilling a mitzvah even if it is not definitely obligated despite having a concern that people might carry on Shabbos, how could such a decree be made to prohibit fulfilling the mitzvah of taking a lulav or blowing the shofar just because it may not really be obligated? One possibility is that the doubt about the infant's viability does not approach the level of doubt we have about which day is really Yom Tov, so one cannot be applied to the other. There is another possibility (or perhaps a basis for saying that the two types of "doubts" aren't comparable).

Reading the M'gila on Purim is of rabbinic origin, so even if the reason for not doing so on Shabbos is the same as for shofar and lulav, the ramifications for applying the decree to M'gila aren't the same. Just as they (the sages) said we should read the M'gila on Purim, they said not to read it on the 14th of Adar if it falls out on a Shabbos (especially if they were concerned about a biblical prohibition being inadvertently violated). The question is really about the decree not to blow the shofar or take the lulav on the specific day that the Torah says we should.

When the Talmud (Rosh Hashana 29b) discusses not blowing the shofar on Shabbos, it contrasts two verses. One verse (Vayikra 23:24) refers to "a remembrance of blowing [the shofar]" while the other (Bamidbar 29:1) calls it "a day of blowing [the shofar]," with the implication being that sometimes we actually blow the shofar and sometimes we don't. When wouldn't we? When Rosh Hashana falls out on Shabbos. Although the Talmud says this can't mean that we are not allowed to blow shofar on Shabbos (or else they wouldn't have been able to do so in the Temple either), the message is still implicit that a decree can be made to create the situation where the shofar isn't actually blown on Rosh Hashana. Therefore, despite the implication from the verse regarding circumcision that we shouldn't prohibit a circumcision if the eighth day falls out on Shabbos—even though we don't know for sure that it is obligatory, the implication regarding shofar is that if we are not sure that there is a mitzvah (because it may not be Rosh Hashana), we can make such a decree. And since the situation regarding lulav is the same, with the same concerns and the same doubt about the obligation, the decree was applied there as well. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Those who seek reasons for Jewish ritual (ta'amei ha-mitzvot) by and large view such observances as a conduit to better feel the presence of G-d. But ritual can also have an alternative goal - to teach ethical lessons in accordance with G-d's will.

A good example is the laws of family purity found in this week's reading (Leviticus Chapter 15) which can be viewed as teaching the Torah ethics of love. The laws include immersion in a mikveh (a natural pool of water) which permits husband and wife to re-engage in sexual relations. This can be seen as a tool through which couples can learn basic lessons about love.

On its simplest level, water is associated with birth. Consider the following: the world begins as G-d hovers over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:2) We become a people as we march through the split sea. (Exodus Ch. 14) We enter Israel as a Jewish people, after crossing the Jordan River. (Joshua Ch. 4)

Bearing in mind that marriages too often become monotonous and even boring, can it be argued that immersion is an attempt to inspire husband and wife to rekindle their love—as if it was reborn?

No wonder water in the Bible is often associated with love. Yitzhak's (Isaac) wife, Rivka (Rebecca) is found at the well. (Genesis Ch. 24) Yaakov (Jacob) meets Rachel as flocks gather around the water. (Genesis Ch. 29) Moshe (Moses) comes in contact with his wife to be, Zipporah, after saving her and her siblings at the river. (Exodus Ch. 2) From this perspective, immersion may be understood as an attempt to mystically bring husband and wife back to those Biblical moments suffused with beautiful romance. The moments surrounding mikvah should evoke memories of the first natural bodies of water mentioned in the Torah—those in Paradise, in the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 2:10-14)

Not coincidentally, water and love have much in common. Without water, one cannot live. Without love, life is virtually impossible.

But, as my dear friend Dr. Bob Grieff pointed out, water, like love, can be fleeting. As water can slip through one's fingers, so can love, if not nurtured, easily slip away.

Ritual requires meticulous Halakhic observance; but this external observance should be a manifestation of a deep internal message. In the case of mikvah, the immersion can remind us that relationships must be nurtured, and that each and every day couples ought strive to love each other more deeply than yesterday - as if their love is born anew. © 1999 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

ZEV S. ITZKOWITZ

A Byte of Torah

“If he is poor and cannot afford [three lambs], [then] he shall take a lamb as a guilt-offering ...” (Leviticus 14:21) Every person purified from Tzara'as must bring a guilt-offering, a sin-offering, and a burnt-offering. However, while a wealthy person is obligated to use a lamb for each one, a poor person can substitute doves for the latter two. Even the poor person, though, has the exact same guilt-offering as a rich person. Why doesn't he get a break here too?

When a person acts wrongly, decides to repent and returns to Hashem, it makes no difference whether he is rich or poor. Each of us has been allotted a different station in life to test us in our religion and morality. In judging someone, Hashem does take his situation into account. Nevertheless, if a person does fail, his guilt is as severe as anybody else's. Because the guilt of the rich and poor is the same, the guilt-offering must be the same (R. Hirsch). © 1995 Z. Itzkowitz