
Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series
Portion of Tazria

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Tazria

Presented by
Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. The Motivating Factor Makes the Difference

The Torah states regarding the mitzvah of circumcision, **“On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.”** The Midrash states, “We see that the Torah does not require any special expenditure regarding the performance of the mitzvah of circumcision. However, come and see to what degree the Jewish people esteem the mitzvos and demonstrate their love for them! They incur great expenditures to fulfill the mitzvos and rejoice in them.” Because the Jewish people esteem the mitzvos, the expense is never an impediment to fulfill the mitzvah. In contrast, they spare no expense to celebrate the mitzvah. The Midrash continues, “G’d said, ‘Because you fulfill the mitzvos with joy, I will add to you an even greater level of joy.’ As it states, ‘Those who are humble will receive another level of joy.’” What is the relationship between one’s humility and the joy pertaining to the fulfillment of the mitzvah of circumcision?

The verse in Yechezkel tells us that before the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt, they were in a “naked” state. Chazal tell us that this is because they were devoid of mitzvos and thus not worthy of redemption. It was because of this that G’d provided them with two mitzvos as a prerequisite to redemption: the mitzvah of circumcision and the mitzvah of the Pascal lamb. The mitzvah of circumcision reestablished the covenant between the Jewish people and G’d. The sacrifice of the Pascal lamb terminated the relationship that the Jewish people had with the deity of Egypt, which was the sheep and the goat.

The Midrash tells us that there was a debate between Rebbe Akiva and Tornistropis, the Roman governor of Jerusalem (who was the one who ultimately put Rebbe Akiva to death). Tornistropis said to Rebbe Akiva, “You Jews believe in G’d and His perfection. If a child is born with a foreskin as G’d’s creation, then why do you remove it through circumcision? How do you tamper with the perfection of G’d’s creation?” Rebbe

Akiva answered, “You do not understand. The world and man are in an imperfect state. Man’s responsibility is to perfect himself and the world. Thus, the removal of the foreskin is an act of perfection and not an act of mutilation.” When one circumcises himself or his child it demonstrates his submission to G’d and a negation of one’s self. Thus, it is an act of humility. This is the meaning of the verse, “Those who are humble will receive another level of joy.” When one fulfills and esteems G’d’s mitzvos to indicate that His Will is the ultimate, it is a demonstration of one’s humility. Thus, G’d will add joy to this individual.

Sforno explains that the fulfillment of all statutes (*chukim*) which are laws that cannot be understood within a rational context, are a demonstration of one’s love for G’d. When a Jew adheres to dietary laws and the prohibition of wearing a garment that has a combination of wool and linen (*shatnez*) he exhibits his love and reverence for G’d, because these laws have no rationale other than being the Will of G’d. If one does not possess humility, he will not perform the mitzvah unless he is able to put it within a rational context. In contrast, if one performs regardless of one’s understanding, it is only because one submits to the Will of G’d. This is truly a demonstration of one’s humility. This is the basis for the humble individual to experience joy when he performs G’d’s Will. To this individual G’d will bestow upon him even greater joy.

2. Appreciating the Gift of Circumcision

The Midrash tells us that there was a dialogue between Rebbe Akiva and Tornistropis, the Roman governor of Jerusalem, “Tornistropis had asked Rebbe Akiva, ‘Whose accomplishments are more perfect – G’d’s or man’s?’” Rebbe Akiva responded, ‘Man’s accomplishments are more perfect.’ Tornistropis asked, ‘Could man replicate the creation of heaven and earth?’ Rebbe Akiva replied, ‘We are not discussing something that is beyond the human capacity. Rather, regarding something that is relevant to man, it is man’s accomplishments that are more perfect.’ Tornistropis

asked, ‘Why do you Jews circumcise yourselves?’ Rebbe Akiva replied, ‘I understood from the beginning that this was the intent of your question. It is because of this that I responded that man’s accomplishments are more perfect than G’d’s.’ Rebbe Akiva then placed before him sheaves of wheat and fully baked loaves of bread. He said, ‘The sheaves of wheat are the handiwork of G’d and the finished loaves of bread are the product of man’s accomplishment. Which of the two is more perfect? The unprocessed sheaves of wheat or the finished loaves of bread?’ Tornistropis replied, ‘If G’d intended the Jew to be circumcised, why did He not create him to be born in a circumcised state?’ Rebbe Akiva responded, ‘G’d gave the Jewish people the mitzvos in order to perfect themselves and be purged from impurity. As it states in Psalms, ‘The Word of G’d purges and perfects ...’ G’d presented man with an imperfect world and gave the Torah to the Jewish people in order to facilitate its perfection.’”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that Adam was initially created without a foreskin; however, as a result of partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which innately possessed evil, the foreskin developed. The foreskin was an expression of the impurity that Adam had brought within himself. The foreskin, which is a covering of the male organ, represents impurity and thus is an obstruction to spirituality. The mitzvah of circumcision was given to the Jew to remove that impurity to allow him to come upon spiritual horizons. G’d’s initial Handiwork contained no impurity. It was because Adam had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge that evil was introduced into himself and all existence. Why did the impurity caused by the sin of Adam manifest itself with the foreskin, which covers the male organ?

The Gemara in Tractate Avidah Zorah tells us that at Sinai, the Jewish people reached the pinnacle of their spiritual ascent. With their declaration, “Naaseh V’nishma (we will do and we will listen),” they assumed the profile of angels. However soon thereafter, the Jewish people sinned with the Golden Calf. How is it possible that after achieving such a level of clarity that they could have transgressed so severely? The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin explains, “The Jewish people served the Golden Calf in order to permit to themselves the sexual relations that were forbidden them (by the Torah).” After Sinai, many of the relationships that were initially permitted became forbidden. Because of the undercurrent of the sexual drive, that they were denied, caused the Jewish people to return to idolatry, which is a denial of the Omnipotent G’d.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that when Adam had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, he was classified as a heretic. Before his sin, he had a level of clarity that enabled him to see from one end of world to the other. With that level of clarity, it is not possible to defy the Will of G’d unless at that moment one denies His existence. The fact that Adam did eat the Tree, is an indication that at that moment Adam was a heretic. When one denies the existence of G’d, based on one’s conflicts of interest, there is no behavior that cannot be justified. The sexual drive in a human, being the all encompassing drive, will therefore control one’s behavior regarding spirituality. The Torah states, **“You shall be holy, for I am holy...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that in order to assume a state of holiness the Jew must separate himself from forbidden sexual relations. Ramban explains that even permitted indulgence in the area of sexuality is a breach of sanctity. The individual assumes the status of “one who behaves despicably but does not violate any laws (*menuval breshus haTorah*).” One who lives as a hedonist has no relevance to holiness. The mitzvah of circumcision is performed on the male organ by removing the foreskin in order to allow him to have a relationship with G’d. The impurity of the Tree of Knowledge manifested itself in the sexual area because it is the area that causes one to be the most conflicted. Thus, if one’s sexual drive is suppressed, he will have greater relevance to clarity.

Chazal tell us that the Egyptian society was depraved because they were immersed in deviant sexual behavior. When Yosef assumed the position of Viceroy he ordered that all the Egyptian males be circumcised before the Jewish people came to Egypt. Arizal explains that Yosef did this so that the Egyptian people should be elevated by tempering their sexual drive. Yosef did this so that the Jewish people should enter into an environment that did not affect them negatively. Rambam writes in the Guide to the Perplexed that one of the reasons that G’d gave the mitzvah of circumcision to the Jewish people is to curb the sexual drive. If does not have this area of his life under control, then he will be subject to conflict.

3. Understanding the Consequences of One’s Speech

The Torah states regarding the person who develops a lesion resembling that of leprosy, **“The Kohen must see him...”** Sforno explains in his commentary that

the contaminated or pure status of the *metzora* can only come about through the pronouncement of the Kohen. The qualification of the Kohen is based on a verse in *Malachi*, “The lips of the Kohen are the keepers of the *daas* (wisdom/Torah).” After the Kohen pronounces the individual as *tamei* (contaminated), he instructs the leper how to introspect and reflect on his behavior because *tzaras* (leprosy) only comes about because of a spiritual failing. The Kohen instructs him to pray that his *teshuvah* (repentance) should be received by G’d and the Kohen will pray on his behalf as well. The Talmud tells us that *tzaras* is a “*Mizbeach kapara* – an altar of atonement.” The state of leprosy sensitizes the person to appreciate his failing and make the proper corrections. When the individual is pronounced a leper, he is sent outside of all the camps.

After the person is pronounced to be a leper and is sent out of all the camps, the Torah states, “**And the person with *tzaras* in whom there is the affliction – his garments shall be torn, the hair on his head shall be unshorn, and he shall cloak himself up to his lips; he is to call out “Contaminated! Contaminated!”**” Rashi explains that he must conduct himself as one who is in a state of mourning. The leper becomes a pariah and is not permitted to return to the camp until his recovery. This entire process is to cause the leper to appreciate the wrong that he has done and to allow him to atone for it.

The Chofetz Chaim writes in his work *Shmiras HaLashon* (Guarding One’s Tongue), that when Moshe was engaged in dialogue with G’d at the burning bush, he had said regarding the Jewish people, “They will not listen to me. They will not believe me.” G’d said to Moshe to throw his staff on the ground and it became a snake. Then Moshe was told to put his hand onto his chest area and it became leprous. The symbolism of the snake and the leprosy was to communicate to Moshe that firstly he assumed the posture of the snake by speaking *lashon hara* against the Jewish people. Secondly, his hand becoming leprous demonstrated that *tzaras* is the consequence of speaking *lashon hara*.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that G’d said to Moshe to take hold of the tail of the snake, and Moshe did so immediately. When Moshe took hold of its tail, the snake reverted into a staff. Usually taking hold of the tail of a snake leaves one more susceptible for being bitten; however, Moshe took hold of the tail without hesitation. Moshe did so because he fully appreciated and understood that he had sinned by speaking *lashon hara*, thus he wished to atone immediately. Because he fully recognized

his failing he was not bitten by the snake, rather it reverted back to a staff – indicating that he had been atoned. The Chofetz Chaim concludes based on this that recognition and admission of one’s spiritual failing is in itself a basis for atonement.

We find this also to be the case regarding the brothers of Yosef. The Torah tells us that Yosef’s brothers realized that their difficulties in Egypt were not due to the accusations of the Viceroy of Egypt but to G’d meting out Justice for their past spiritual failing. Initially when they had sold their brother Yosef into slavery they were convinced that they had acted correctly. However, their difficulties in Egypt caused them to realize their misconception. This realization was their atonement.

The way one silences prosecution (from satan) is to acknowledge one’s guilt. If the prosecutor is prosecuting and one admits his own guilt, the prosecutor has no reason to prosecute any longer. Judgment comes about because of prosecution.

The Rabbis legislated that whenever (G’d forbid) tragedies come upon a Jew, he must say the blessing of, “*Baruch Dayan HaEmes* – Blessed is the True Judge!” One must understand that his difficulties are not because of physical matters, economic conditions, or anything other than G’d’s Judgment because of his own spiritual failing. When one declares “*Baruch Dayan HaEmes*,” he is acknowledging that Judgment of G’d is truthful and is thereby admitting his failing. If a person truly internalized this fact he would silence prosecution against him and be atoned. This is similar to the leper introspecting and thus recognizing his failing through the instruction of the Kohen. The Rabbis understood the value of acknowledging this reality. Therefore, they enacted the recitation of “*Baruch Dayan HaEmes*.”

Thus, if one experiences difficulties, the sooner he acknowledges and recognizes the basis for his problem, the sooner he will recover. It is the recognition of the problem that initiates the rehabilitation.

4. Torah, Under Duress

The Torah states, “**...When a woman conceives and gives birth...**” The Midrash cites a verse from Psalms, “ ‘Before and after You have restricted me (achar v’kedem tzartani)...’ Adam had said, ‘After G’d had created all of the animals, birds, insects, and creatures, He created me.’ Meaning, Adam had understood that before

he was created, G'd had brought about all existence to accommodate him...Similarly, the fetus before it leaves the womb of its mother, G'd commands it, 'This you are permitted to eat and this is not permitted to eat. This is contaminating to you and this is not contaminating to you.' Only after the fetus had accepted upon itself all of the commandments of the Torah, does G'd allow it to be born. This is the reason the Portion of Shemini, which discusses all of the permitted and forbidden species, precedes the portion of Tazria, which discusses the conception and birth of a child." Thus, the sequential order of the Portions teaches us that the child is first taught all of the laws regarding what is permitted and forbidden, and then it comes into existence.

This is similar to what is stated in the Gemara in Tractate Nidah, that a child in-utero is taught the Torah in its entirety by an angel. While the child is in the womb, it has a level of clarity that enables it to "see from one end of the world to the other." A moment before the child is born, the angel makes it take an oath to adhere to all of the mitzvos that it was taught. Only then is it allowed to be born.

It is interesting to note that the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that at the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, G'd held the mountain over them. G'd had given them an ultimatum saying, "If you accept the Torah it shall be good for you. If not, there shall you be buried." If the Jewish people had not accepted the Torah, the world would have reverted back to a state of preexistence. The Gemara concludes that because of this ultimatum, it is considered that the Torah was given under duress. Is this truly considered under duress? If one wishes to be hired for a position that requires an unusual level of commitment, it is understood that the employee must meet its requirements and responsibilities. This employment is not considered to be under duress, because the employee agrees to meet all of the conditions of the employer. G'd's only objective in creating existence was that it should be the setting for the Jewish people to fulfill the Torah. If they had chosen not to accept the Torah, then the sole objective of creation would never be met. It is understood that G'd would cause the world to revert to a state of non-existence, if the Jewish People did not accept the Torah. With this understanding, duress assumes another connotation. Rather than understanding it to mean "being forced" to do something against one's will, it becomes appreciating the reality of one's predicament and then acting wisely.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states, "...against your will you are formed, against your will you are born, against your will you live, against your will you die..." As was explained by the Gemara in Tractate Nidah and the Midrash, the child in-utero has no choice but to accept the Torah that it was taught. This is replicating the setting of Sinai. Just as the Jewish people understood with clarity, the consequences of rejecting the Torah, so too does the child, because of its level of understanding, accepts the Torah.

When one understands the consequences of his actions with absolute clarity, he has no choice but to act wisely – doing the Will of G'd. This is the commonality between the child in-utero and the Jewish people at the foot of Sinai. However, one must aspire to transcend this level of understanding and accept the Word of G'd not for the sake of existence, but rather, to feel privileged to be able to serve his Master.

5. *G'd Providing Opportunity*

The Torah states, "...When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male...If she gives birth to a female..." The Midrash states, "If the woman had ovulated by the time of cohabitation, the child conceived will be a male. However if she had not yet ovulated at the time of cohabitation, the child will be a female. Reb Chiya Bar Aba says, 'From this we see that the (conception of) male (child) is dependant on the female and the (conception of a) female (child) is dependant on the male.'... As it states, Avraham was informed 'Milka (female) had given birth to sons to Nochor, your brother...' We see also from the verse, 'Bisuel (Male) had fathered Rivka.' Thus, the female identifies with the conception of a male and the male is identified with the conception of the female." Why did G'd create the world in this manner – that the conception of the male is determined by the woman and the conception of the female is determined by the man?

Ksav Sofer (the son of the Chasam Sofer) explains that since the female is not obligated in many of the mitzvos that the man is obligated to perform, she is denied the spiritual benefit of those mitzvos from which she is exempt. For example, while a man is obligated in the study of Torah, which in relationship to other mitzvos is the ultimate, a woman is not. G'd created existence in a way to allow each person to be able to be a spiritual beneficiary of all the mitzvos. Thus, by allowing the female to be the cause of the conception of the male, she is in essence the

one responsible from bringing him into existence. Therefore, all the spiritual accomplishments that the son will achieve in his lifetime will accrue to the mother who initially conceived him. It is in this manner that the woman can reap the merit and spiritual benefits of the mitzvos that do not pertain to her. Similarly, there are many mitzvos that pertain only to the woman, such as the laws of family purity (counting days towards purity, emersion in a mikvah, etc.). to which the male has no relevance. Therefore, G'd allowed the male to be the cause of the conception of the female in order for him to be a beneficiary of his daughter's spiritual accomplishments.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin states, 'The son brings merit to the father but the father does not bring merit to the son.' Meaning, if the father was evil and he had a righteous son, he would be a beneficiary of the spiritual accomplishments of his son. However, if a righteous father were to have an evil son, the son's spiritual record will not be enhanced by the spiritual accomplishments of the father. Although the evil son may be presented with special spiritual opportunities in his lifetime, because he is the son of a righteous individual; the righteousness of his father will not be attributed to him. This is because the father is the cause of the son's existence, which is not the case regarding the son versus the father.

Based on the principle that a son brings merit to the father, the Mishna in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that if one comes upon the lost object of his father and the lost object of a third party, returning the object to the father takes precedence over the other. Because, "His father had brought him into existence." The Mishna continues - if one finds the lost object of his father and the lost object of his rebbe (spiritual mentor), returning the object of his mentor takes precedence, because "His father brought him into the physical world; however, his rebbe gave him relevance to the world to come ..." Eternal existence has greater value than the limited existence in this world. Therefore, the rebbe takes precedence over the father.

Ramah writes in his glosses on the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) that if one provides for the Jewish education of another, he is considered to be the equivalent of his mentor (rabo muvak), although he never engaged in the study of Torah with the recipient of his support. This is because without the benefactor's financial support, the student would have never been able to develop as a Torah Jew. He is thus directly responsible for the spiritual development of the student. Consequently, all the

spiritual accomplishments of the student accrue to the benefactor.

Chofetz Chaim writes that if one provides the means for an individual or a family to become more observant and they actually advance spiritually, the initial supporter will reap all the merit that will be generated by the family until the end of existence. This is because the benefactor was the catalyst that allowed the spiritual advancement to come about.

G'd provided the Jewish people with a setting and mechanism that allows them to reap maximum benefit from mitzvah performance. Regardless of how removed one may be from the actualization of the performance of the Torah Itself, the benefactor who supports it will be the beneficiary of all that came about as a result of his support. Similarly, G'd created the male and the female in a way that each of them will be the beneficiary of the other gender's mitzvah performance.

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Metzora

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. Prosecuting the Jewish People

Chofetz Chaim explains that regarding certain negative behavior patterns, the Torah is not explicit in addressing them. However, there are specific negative commandments that address the wrong of *lashon hara* (negative speech). The Torah in the Portion of Kedoshim states the negative commandment, “**You shall not be a gossipmonger among your people (Lo telech rachil b’ameicha).....**” There are two classification of negative speech. Firstly, *lashon hara* is when one speaks negatively about his fellow, although it may be true it is without any constructive value or purpose. The second classification of negative speech, included in this negative commandment, is “*recheilus* (tale bearing).” This is when one conveys information to an individual regarding what another had said about him, although it may be true. Because it evokes negative feelings when shared, it is a Torah violation.

The Babylonian Talmud tells us that baseless hatred among Jews (*sinaas chinam*) is the equivalent of the Three Cardinal Sins (murder, idolatry, and forbidden relations). The Jerusalem Talmud tells us that *lashon hara* is the equivalent of the Three Cardinal Sins. Chofetz Chaim explains that in fact, there is no argument between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud. The only reason one speaks negatively about his fellow is because of his baseless hatred toward him. If one truly loved his fellow, he would not speak negatively about him. Why is *lashon hara* regarded as such a grave sin?

The Gemara states regarding *lashon hara*, “Negative speech kills three people: the one who speaks it, the one who listens to it, and the one about whom it was spoken about.” Doeg Haadomi, the antagonist of King David, went to King Saul and informed him that Nov the city of Kohanim, was harboring David. As a result of Doeg’s transmission of this information, Doeg (the one who spoke *lashon hara*) was killed, King Saul (the one who listened to it and gave the order to destroy the city of

Nov (about whom it was spoken about)) and his children were killed in the war with the Philistines.

Chofetz Chaim in the introduction to his work, *Chofetz Chaim* writes that satan, continuously approaches G’d to allow him to bring prosecution against the Jewish people because their spiritual record is far from perfect. It is not in accordance with the Torah, which is the Will of G’d. Despite the blemished record of the Jewish people, G’d does not allow satan to prosecute. He says to satan, “I do not want to hear any negative speech about My children.” Thus, satan’s prosecution is silenced. However, when the Jewish people speak negatively (*lashon hara*) about one another, satan can approach G’d with a claim that he has a right to prosecute them. Satan says, “If Your children are speaking negatively about one another without any constructive purpose, I should be allowed to speak about their record to prosecute them.” G’d allows satan to bring prosecuting, which brings about untold tragedy.

When the Attribute of Justice is in effect, the level of suffering that comes upon the Jewish people is severe and it does not differentiate between the devoutly righteous and the evil. This is the reason the sin of *lashon hara* is considered to be even more severe than the Three Cardinal Sins.

G’d endowed man with the power of speech in order to study Torah and engage in other verbalization of spirituality. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin cites a verse from Eyov, “Man was created to toil...” The Gemara asks, “To toil in what?” It answers based on the verse, “To toil in Torah.” Man toils in Torah through its verbal articulation. G’d Created existence for man to be able to perfect himself and existence through the study of Torah. If one utilizes his speech, which was given to him to perfect himself and the world in a spiritual context, if he chooses to putrefy it through *lashon hara* it is considered an abuse and desecration of the ultimate that was given to mankind.

The Gemara in Tractate Niddah tells us that the children of Yehudah were taken by G’d because they

wasted seed. The Gemara asks, “What was one of the failings of the generation of the Great Flood? They were considered to be slaughterers of children (*shochtei yeladim*) (based on a verse in Prophets).” The Gemara explains that the letter “shin” in the word “shochtei” could also be read as “sin” which would read as “*sochtein yeladim*.” Meaning, they had the ability to bring about children with their seed, but because they wasted their seed, they wasted potential lives. Thus, the Gemara concludes that one who wastes seed is the equivalent of the generation of the Great Flood.

G’d gave man the ability to procreate and bring about life (which is the ultimate potential) through semen. If one chooses to destroy it by wasting seed rather than bringing about life, it is a desecration of the ultimate endowment given to man. Thus he is liable to be taken as the Generation of the Flood. This is similar to the abuse and desecration of one’s power of speech, which was endowed to man to fulfill his objective in existence. If one chooses to desecrate something of the ultimate value, to bring about destruction rather than creation by speaking *lashon hara*, the liability is the equivalent of the Three Cardinal Sins. Thus, he deserves to be taken by G’d.

2. The Miracle of Leprosy

The Torah states that after the leper recovers from his leprous state, “**The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, clean birds, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop.**” Rashi explains, “What is the symbolism of these three items? The cedar tree, which is something that is majestic, represents arrogance. The crimson thread (which is referred to as *tolaas shani* ‘the red worm’), represents a lowly creature. The hyssop is a lowly grass, which represents humility. The individual initially became a leper because of his arrogance and haughtiness. What is the remedy for his arrogant posture? He must lower himself from his exalted state of haughtiness to the level of a worm and lowly grass. Only then the leper will recover from his spiritual illness, which was an outgrowth of his lack of humility.”

After the leper is declared to be contaminated by the Kohen, he is sent outside of all the camps where he remains in solitude. He is the equivalent of a pariah and no one is permitted to associate with him. He remains in this state of solitude so that he can reflect and introspect on the wrong that he had done. When he comes to the realization that only the Mercy of G’d could take him out of his

leprous state he can begin the process of recovery. If he does not introspect and repent, he may remain in a leprous state his entire life. He should thus also tell others that he is a leper so that they may pray on his behalf. Although the leper may intellectually understand the wrong that he had done, he needs to remain in a helpless state of embarrassment being separated from the Jewish people until he internalizes the wrong that he had done.

Sforno in his commentary on the Portion of Tazria explains regarding the contamination of leprosy, “The leprosy that affects a garment or the walls of one’s house is not similar to any deterioration of these items...These lesions and discolorations are intended to open the ears of the owner of the garment or the house to the sin that he has committed. As the Gemara tells us regarding engaging in the produce of the Sabbatical Year in a commercial manner...” The Torah tells us that it is forbidden to derive financial benefit from the produce of the Sabbatical year. The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin states that if a person engages in commercial transactions with produce of the Sabbatical Year he will face many severe consequences which will evolve over time. This person will have to initially sell his movable assets and subsequently his fixed assets (properties and house). Eventually because of his financial difficulties, he will need to sell his daughter into slavery, and ultimately be forced to sell himself as a slave (not only to a Jew but even an idolater). The Gemara tells us that when one initially is confronted with these difficulties he should appreciate that it is because he had transgressed and thus should be motivated to correct his wrongdoings. However if he glosses over the problem and remains oblivious to his circumstance, G’d will further complicate his financial state and ultimately cause him to lose everything (including his freedom).

Sforno continues, “The human being is the ultimate purpose of existence because he is the only one who could reflect G’d in his understanding and actions. As it states, ‘**Let us make man in Our image, after Our form...**’ Man’s intellect is a reflection of G’d’s Image and his free choice is a reflection of G’d’s Form...This value and reflection only has relevance to the Jew...Those who are in a trance and will not be awakened or aroused whatsoever are considered to be under the influence of the Zodiac. They are affected by the natural order as any animal...However, when the Jew chooses to reflect upon his actions and repent, he has relevance to G’d and is thus taken beyond the influence of the Zodiac...Unfortunately, since the generations have not achieved this level of awareness and status, there has not been the occurrence of

the leprosy mentioned in the Torah.” The leprosy discussed in the Torah is not a physical ailment but rather it is a physical manifestation of a spiritual failing. It is intended to awaken the individual and cause him to reflect upon the wrong that he has done. Thus, it is a miracle that is an alteration of the natural order. G’d however does not bring about a miracle if it will not be heeded. He will not alter nature if man will not notice the miracle. Since the generations are in a state of trance to such a degree that they do not have the capacity to recognize the miracle of leprosy or be moved spiritually by its occurrence, G’d does not bring it about.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that there is an iron curtain that separates man from G’d that is brought about by sin. As a result of this blockage one’s prayers are not able to ascend to be heard by G’d because the individual is entombed in sin. To be able to respond and react to a miracle, one needs to have some degree of spiritual sensitivity. However, since we are in such a removed state, we do not have the capacity to appreciate the miracle of *tzaraas*. The only way one is able to achieve a level of sensitivity is to have G’d open our hearts to have a sense of reverence for Him through our study of Torah, which is the only antidote to the entombment of sin.

3. Nissan, the Month of Kindness

The Torah tells us that on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan Aaron and his sons were installed as Kohanim and the Mishkan assumed a permanent status. This occurred on the first day of the month of Nissan (*rosh chodesh*). Why did this take place on this day and not any other month? The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that the joy that G’d had experienced when the Mishkan was inaugurated and the Divine Presence entered into it was no less than the joy He experienced at the time of Creation.

The initial intent of Creation was for G’d’s Presence to dwell in the physical realm with Man to be His Officiant. G’d endowed man with the ability to choose and gave him a prescription by which to live, namely the Torah. By adhering to His Will man was given the opportunity to perfect himself and existence to merit the ultimate relationship with G’d. G’d created existence with the intent that man should be able to interact with Him on the same plane of existence and not to be separated from him. However, because Adam had failed by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, physical existence was no longer fit for the Divine Presence. By

sinning, Adam putrefied the world that was created to be a pristine setting for G’d. As a result G’d removed His Presence from existence and thus created a separation between Himself and man. After the Jewish people had sinned with the Golden Calf, G’d forgave and reinstated them through Moshe’s supplications. Consequently, G’d said, “Build for Me a Sanctuary, so that I may dwell in your midst.” The Mishkan was the location in which G’d would dwell in the physical world. The Mishkan was a replication of the original setting of existence to accommodate G’d’s Presence. Therefore, when the Mishkan was completed and the Divine Presence entered into it, G’d experienced the same level of joy as He had at the time of Creation because through the Mishkan the initial intent of Creation could be fulfilled.

There is an argument in the Gemara between Reb Eliezer and Reb Yeshua regarding the time of Creation. One opinion is that G’d Created the world in the month of Nissan, while the other opinion is that He Created it in Tishrei. Chazal tell us that every aspect of the Mishkan, which was completed on *rosh chodesh* Nissan reflected every aspect of Creation. This is the reason the Gemara tells us that we learn from the building of the Mishkan all of the creative activities from which one must refrain on Shabbos. Just as G’d refrained from creative activity on Shabbos in His Creating the existence, so too should the Jew refrain from creative activity as it is defined by the building of the Mishkan, since it is a replication of Creation. Thus, just as the world was initially created in Nissan, when the Mishkan was inaugurated in Nissan it was a reenactment of the completion of Creation.

King David writes in Psalms, “*Olam chesed Yibaneh* – Through kindness the world was created.” Meaning, the basis for the Creation of Existence was His Attribute of Kindness. Each of the holy Patriarchs chose to emulate a particular Attribute of G’d and perfect that characteristic within themselves. Avraham our Patriarch chose to emulate G’d’s Attribute of Kindness (Chesed). Yitzchak chose to emulate G’d’s Attribute of Justice by being exacting in every aspect of his service. Yaakov our Patriarch, chose to emulate G’d’s Attribute of Mercy. Why did Avraham choose to emulate the Attribute of Kindness?

Before G’d brought existence into being, there was no need to create it, other than doing Kindness. Prior to Creation, because nothing existed, there was no being that was worthy of reward. Thus there was nothing compelling G’d to bring about existence other than His Infinite Kindness. G’d wanted to create a setting that would allow

man to have the opportunity to make choices. If he should choose correctly, he would be worthy of the ultimate Goodness, which is cleaving to G'd Who is the source of all Good. Since Avraham was the first person to introduce G'd to mankind, his era was the equivalent of the beginning of Creation. This was the first opportunity for man to again make a choice to believe in G'd or not. Therefore, Avraham, following the sequence of existence, chose to emulate the Attribute of Kindness, which was G'd's first expression of Himself to mankind.

The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah states, "In the Month of Nissan our forefathers were redeemed, in Nissan (in the future) they are destined to be redeemed." If the Jewish people were not redeemed from Egypt, existence would have no value. Thus, they were redeemed from Egypt out of the Infinite Kindness of G'd. Just as Creation was brought about through His Kindness in Nissan so too did He redeem His children to become the chosen people in Nissan. Nissan is the beginning of the establishment of the Jewish people, who give meaning to the world. Shalom HaKadosh writes that the Jewish people were not actually worthy to be redeemed from Egypt. The only reason they were redeemed was because G'd had promised Avraham that his children would be redeemed. Out of G'd's Kindness He gave the Jewish people the mitzvos of circumcision and the Pascal offering to give them some worthiness to be able to extricate them from Egypt. He performed revealed miracles on their behalf which is a further demonstration of His Kindness.

It was obvious from the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt that there is Divine Providence and G'd is involved with creation on a continuous basis. Ramban explains that every aspect of nature is a concealed miracle, which further demonstrates G'd's Hand in existence. It is only because G'd Wills nature does it function as it does. It is no different than the splitting of the Sea.

At the time of the splitting of the Sea, the angels said to G'd, "Why are you sparing the Jewish people and destroying the Egyptians? These are idolaters and these are idolaters." The angels were saying, since the Jewish people are idolaters no less than the Egyptians, why are the Egyptians considered to be more culpable? The Jewish people deserve to perish in the Sea as the Egyptians do. G'd responded to the angels by telling them that there is no comparison between the two of them. The Egyptian masters worshipped idols willingly. However, the Jewish people, who were their slaves and under their control were vulnerable to the influences of their masters. They thus

only became pagans under duress and coercion. They thus cannot be held culpable to the same degree as the Egyptians. Once again G'd demonstrated His Unlimited Kindness towards the Jewish people as He had expressed His Kindness in the act of Creation.

Since Nissan is a month of Kindness and G'd demonstrated His Kindness in the month of Nissan in a revealed manner, the Jewish people as His people need to reflect G'd's characteristic of Kindness. The Zohar writes that if a Jew behaves in a kind manner, it will activate G'd's Kindness from above. Before Pesach it is customary for one to give charity so that those who cannot afford the needs of Passover should be able to enjoy the holiday. By giving generously, we should merit G'd's Kindness to come upon us.

4. Speaking Negatively, the Origin of Death

The Midrash tells us that the first one to speak *lashon hara* (evil speech) was the original snake in the Garden of Eden, who spoke negatively about G'd. The Midrash states, "G'd said to the snake, Because you spoke *lashon hara* you will be smitten with leprosy. As it states, '**You will be more cursed than all of the animals...**' What is the curse of the snake? It shall be afflicted with leprosy...The rings that are skin of the snake is a representation of its leprosy. At the end of time all blemishes will be healed; however, the snake shall not be healed. As it states, '**You will be more cursed than all of the animals...**' From here we learn that at the end of time every creature will recover from its deficiency, but the snake will not. As it states, 'The lion will eat straw as the cow...' However, the snake will continue to eat earth. The fact that it will continue to be sustained by earth is an indication that it will not be healed ever. Why is this? It is because the snake brought all existence into the ground. It was through the snake speaking *lashon hara* that death was introduced into the world."

Earth, which is the fodder of the snake, is something that has no life. Because of the impurity of existence, which came about through the *lashon hara* of the snake, everything must die and its life source departs from it. The body is thus left as lifeless earth. Adam was meant to be an eternal being, but because of the snake, he became an earthly being that has relevance to death. Since the snake took something eternal and transformed it into a material and limited entity, its affliction will be eternal.

The Gemara tells us that *lashon hara* is the equivalent of the Three Cardinal Sins. It was because of *lashon hara* that the world has relevance to death. Speaking *lashon hara* has such severe consequences because when one does so, he engages in a behavior that brought about the destruction of existence.

Based on Jewish law, if one speaks negatively about a non-Jew, one does not violate the prohibition of *lashon hara*. It is only when a Jew speaks *lashon hara* about his fellow does he violate. Why is that so? The Gemara in Tractate Yevomos cites a verse from Yechezkel that indicates that the classification of the Jewish people is “*adam* (man).” The inference of the verse is that the nations of the world are not classified as “*adam* (man). As it states, “You (the Jewish people) are called *adam* (man)...” Adam was the handiwork of G’d and had the potential to perfect himself and existence. However, because he sinned, which was a consequence of the snake speaking *lashon hara*, he putrefied himself and all existence, thus introducing death into the world. At Sinai, the Jewish people achieved such an advanced dimension of spirituality that they were reinstated to the level of Adam before the sin. They no longer had relevance to death. As Chazal tell us regarding the spiritual status of the Jewish people at Sinai, “*Puska zuamason* (their contamination ceased).” Meaning, the original contamination that came about from the sin of Adam was removed from them.

The non-Jew on the other hand who did not receive the Torah at Sinai continue to be affected by the original contamination that came upon existence as a result of Adam’s sin. *Lashon hara* has relevance to death and the original intense contamination that came into the world. Thus, when one speaks *lashon hara* about a non-Jew who continues to be affected by the contamination of the snake’s *lashon hara*, one does not violate. In contrast, if a Jew speaks negatively about his fellow, he is introducing contamination and death upon one who was extricated from the effects of the snake’s *lashon hara*. Therefore, one is in violation of the prohibition of *lashon hara* only when one speaks it about a Jew.

The Gemara tells us that G’d has a schedule of His activities during the day that is divided in groups of three hours. During the third three-hour division of the day, G’d sustains all existence. He provides sustenance to every creature from the largest to the smallest. Every species is sustained by what is found in its habitat with the exception of the snake. Since the snake was cursed to be sustained by eating earth, it can find sustenance wherever it is. One

would think that this is a blessing and not a curse. Chazal explain that the greatest curse is to be detached from G’d. Every species has an ongoing relationship with G’d because He provides sustenance for them every day. The snake on the other hand has no relationship with G’d because it sustains itself by eating earth. Thus, the snake is more cursed than any creature, although it can sustain itself in every context. Chazal explain that earth is something that is completely removed from spirituality. When one becomes more “earthy” it is an indication that his spirituality is in a state of decline because he values and engages in the material to a greater extent. By being sustained by earth, the snake is the most cursed creature because it lives on a substance that is the antithesis of G’dliness.

The Torah states, “**Amalek was first among the nations, but their end will be utter destruction.**” Amalek was the first nation to attack the Jewish people after they left Egypt despite the miracles that were performed on their behalf. The rest of the world stood in awe of G’d’s chosen people while Amalek were unaffected to any degree. At the end of time Amalek will need to be obliterated. As G’d’s says, “My Throne will not be complete until the name of Amalek is obliterated.” Although other nations have perhaps victimized the Jewish people to a greater extent than the Amalekites they will not be obliterated at the end of time. It is because Amalek is a species unto itself and not part of the rest of the nations of the world, similar to the snake that is separate from all other creatures. Both the snake and Amalek have no hope of redemption because of their level of evil.

5. *Reinstating G’d’s Presence in Existence*

The Torah in the Portion of Metzora tells us the laws that pertain to the woman who is a menstruant (*niddah*). The Midrash cites the Mishna, “There are three sins that cause a woman to die during childbirth: not being careful in the laws regarding menstruation, tithing the dough, and kindling the candles of Shabbos. Why should they be subject to death during the time of childbirth? Because it is a time when one’s life is in danger.” The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that satan prosecutes when one is in a state of danger. It is only if one has sufficient merit will one survive and live.

The Midrash continues, “...From where do we learn that one needs to light the Shabbos candles with meticulousness and zeal? It is stated in Yishaya, ‘You must declare the Shabbos as a day of joy....’” The

Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that if one only had enough money to either purchase wine for Kiddush or candles for lighting, one should purchase the candles because “peace in the home takes precedence.” One cannot function in a state of darkness. The Midrash continues, “Why is the woman obligated in the lighting of the candles? It is because G’d said, ‘Since she extinguished the light of the world, the woman needs to kindle the Shabbos candles.’” By lighting the Shabbos candles, the woman is correcting the wrong that was done by Chava at the time of Creation when she offered the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge to Adam her husband. The Midrash tells us that before Adam sinned, he radiated to such a degree that the angels had mistaken his radiance for G’d’s radiance and thus mistakenly sung praises to him. However, after he had eaten from the Tree he became minimized and his radiance was diminished. This is how the woman extinguished the light of the world. Kindling the Shabbos candles is to accommodate the Shabbos being a day of joy. How could the kindling of the Shabbos candles be a correction for Chava’s extinguishing the light of the world?

After Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, he went into hiding because he was ashamed of his nakedness. Prior to sinning, Adam was at an exceptionally advanced spiritual level; however, as a result of eating from the Tree, he was diminished to such a degree that it is the equivalent of a healthy person becoming severely debilitated and non-functional. After eating from the fruit of the Tree, the transition that had taken place within Adam was so drastic that he had fallen from the heights of spirituality to a level that had no semblance of his original state. Thus, he became ashamed because of his disgraceful state of being. As a result of Chava’s causing Adam to eat from the Tree, she caused the representation of G’d’s Presence in existence to be diminished. The Torah tells us that G’d created Chava for Adam so that he should not be alone. As it states, **“It is not good for man to be alone...”** Chazal explain that since Adam’s representation of holiness had a semblance of G’d’s radiance, there was a concern that people would say that just as there is One above who is alone, so too is there one below who is alone. Therefore, G’d created the woman to be a helpmate to establish a differentiation between Adam and Himself. However, G’d’s initial intent was that Adam should be a reflection of Him in His form and image.

When one kindles the lights of Shabbos, it is a representation and acknowledgement that the Divine Presence enters into existence on Shabbos. The Gemara in

Tractate Beitzah tells us that since the beginning of existence, the sanctity of the Shabbos is set and fixed in place, regardless of the existence of the Jewish people. It is a time when the Divine Presence enters into existence. However, the sanctity of the Festivals and other Holidays are determined by the declaration of the Sanhedrin. Since the woman undermined the representation of G’d in the world by causing Adam to be diminished, she can correct this wrong by kindling the Shabbos candles because it is an acknowledgment of G’d’s Presence in the world. Chazal tell us that Shabbos has a semblance of the world to come. Just as in the world to come one will be close to G’d because he will be in a spiritual existence, so too is one close to G’d because He enters into existence.

The Midrash states, “Since the woman shed Adam’s blood by giving him to eat of the Tree (eating from the Tree introduced death into Adam and the world) her correction will come through her blood. This is the menstrual blood.”

There is a Positive commandment, **“You shall walk in the way of G’d.”** Meaning, the Jew must emulate His ways. As the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, “Just as I am Merciful, you should be merciful. Just as I am gracious, you should be gracious...” In order for one to have a relationship with another, he must have some commonality with him. If they are not compatible in this manner, they will not have a relationship. Chofetz Chaim explains that since G’d Created man in His image and form, then man must behave accordingly. By emulating G’d one is not trying to have a commonality with Him, but rather, one is behaving in a manner that is consistent with him being created in the image of G’d. Ramak writes in Tomer Dvorah that if one does not live in a manner that reflects G’d’s Characteristics, then one is living in a false state of existence because his form is not consistent with his image. It is similar to a human being behaving as a monkey, which is a disgrace. Before the sin, Adam was the image and form of G’d, but because Chava gave him to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, he diminished himself and thus disgraced G’d through his diminishment.