

הַדְגֵּבָה
יְסֻדֵּי

פרשת תזריע Parshat Tazria

Ashreinu | אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

לעילוי נשמת כרמיאל שי בן אשר שמעון

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Planting Good Seeds In Our Life

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This Shabbat, we are going to read from three Torah scrolls: one for Parshat Tazria, one for Rosh Chodesh, and one for Shabbat Ha-Chodesh. Parshat Tazria opens with

the laws of post-natal purity and then continues with the procedures of handling cases of leprosy. There are three questions I would like to ask about Parshat Tazria: What is the connection between the laws of purity after giving birth and leprosy?

What is the significance of leprosy as a consequence for slander (*lashon hara*)?

What can we do to overcome the challenge of gossip/slander in our life?

In the second aliyah of this week's parsha, the pasuk says:

אָדָם כִּי יִהְיֶה בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ שָׂאֵת אוֹ סַפְחַת אוֹ בִּהְרֵת וְהָיָה
בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ לְנֹגַע צָרַעַת וְהוּבָא אֶל אֹהֶלן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל
אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים

“When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affliction on the skin of his body, When an inflammation appears on the skin of one's body and it heals, the priest shall examine the affliction” (Vayikra 13:2).

In Sefer Bereishit, the Torah says:

וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

“And God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” (Bereishit 2:7)

Onkelos translates the words “a living being” as a “speaking spirit.”

One of the fundamental abilities that distinguishes a living person is the ability to speak. Ironically, we learn about leprosy after reading about giving birth. This is to teach us also what our ability to speak can cause when

done improperly. While we have a powerful capacity as living creatures by speaking, we must also know that speaking can be used in the wrong way. So how can we overcome the challenge of watching what we say?

In Masechet Negaim (Perek 2, Mishna 5), our sages teach us that we can identify all the blemishes that are around us except for our own.

כל הנגעים אדם רואה חוץ מנגעי עצמו

One can use the teaching mishna as guidance in avoiding *lashon hara* by always remembering that we can easily see how others are not good/fit/skilled but it is rather hard to see our own shortcomings. The Rambam in his Mishneh Torah adds that it is advisable for anyone with a meaningful life to avoid the company and refrain from talking with friends who have the habit of speaking *lashon hara*. This is because being with such people would lead us to “get caught in the net of evil and arrogant men.”

Finally, I would also add that while being careful about *lashon hara* is a must, getting comfortable with increasing *lashon tov* is highly desired behavior. *Lashon tov* means making sure that when you talk about others it is always in their favor, even if they do not deserve your compliments at that moment. Using our ability to speak to say positive things not only keeps us away from *lashon hara*, but also fills our life with happiness no matter where we are.

Shabbat Shalom

Torah Brain

Binny Perl ('24)

Amongst the halachot found in Parshat Tazria are the laws about *tzara'at*. Interestingly, the Torah differentiates between *tzara'at* found on the back of the head and *tzara'at* on the front of the head. Why is there a difference?

The Netziv answers that *tzara'at* on the head symbolizes *aveirot* we commit with our thoughts, of which there are two categories. The first category of *aveirot* comes from incorrectly drawing conclusions, and the second category comes from a lack of faith altogether, which the Netziv notes is far worse. Since the area of the brain that controls faith is located in the back of the head and the area which controls rational thought is in the front of the head, the Torah differentiates between the two, putting the worse of the two categories first.

Often, we assume that Torah and science contradict each other. However, the Torah's methodical and scientific approach to *tzara'at* reminds us that, in reality, science and Torah complement each other to help us explain and understand ideas and laws.

Milah Mindset

Meirav Horowitz ('25)

This week we read Parshat Tazria, in which the Torah discusses the mitzvah of *brit milah*. This is not the first or last time the Torah has talked about *brit milah*. Back in Sefer Bereishit, Avraham is commanded to circumcise himself and his household, which he does even at his very old age. Among the various times that the concept of a *brit milah* is mentioned, there are two times where a *brit milah* is specifically juxtaposed with Pesach.

The first time this happens is right before the Jews leave Egypt. Everyone who did not have a *brit milah* was required to get one. This happens right before our first official Pesach Seder, on the original Pesach night.

The second time this happens is right after the Jews enter Eretz Yisrael after wandering for 40 years in the desert. Right after entering the land of Israel, there is a mass *brit milah*. Then, a few days later, the Jewish people celebrate Pesach for the first time in 39 years. So what is the connection between Pesach and *brit milah*?

Pesach is our yearly reset and a reminder of our commitment to Hashem. It is the time of year when we think about how Hashem saved us and fulfilled the promises He made. It is when we reaffirm our belief in Hashem and *only* Hashem. *Brit milah* is also a way of showing our commitment to Hashem. It is the way for a baby boy to “join” the Jewish people and prepare to be a Torah-observant Jew.

In this week's parsha we read about *brit milah*, and Pesach is just around the corner, just like it was in the two situations mentioned above. Just like the Jews in Egypt and in Eretz Yisrael, before we can commit to our relationship with Hashem, we have to prepare ourselves. As Pesach is approaching we should all think about whether we are prepared to reaffirm our commitment to Hashem.

Have a good Shabbos!

Pure Intentions

Olivia Kahane ('23)

This week's parsha, Parshat Tazria, starts with the laws of childbirth and impurity.

דִּבֶּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וַיֵּלֶד זָכָר
וְטָמְאָה שְׁבַע יָמִים כִּימֵי נִדַּת דְּוֹתָהּ תִּטְמָא

“Speak to Bnei Yisrael saying, if a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be unclean for seven days; as [in] the days of her menstrual flow, she shall be unclean” (Vayikra 12:1).

Why does giving birth make a woman impure? Furthermore, when does the mother go from a state of impurity to being pure? As stated in the pesukim, when a mother gives birth to a boy, she becomes pure on the eighth day (the day of the *brit milah*). However, when the mother gives birth to a girl she becomes pure after two weeks. Why is a woman impure at all after childbirth, and what is the meaning of the difference between repurification after a boy vs. a girl? In the pasuk, the women's impurity is compared to *niddah* – כִּימֵי נִדַּת דְּוֹתָהּ תִּטְמָא – but how does this even relate to her impurity if she is impure due to childbirth? The Rashbam explains that the word *niddah* means “to be separated from”, and when a woman is in *niddah* it is because she must be separated from her husband. Therefore, when a woman gives birth she is impure and in *niddah* because of her displacement. This can be mirrored with the first birth in the Torah, the birth of Kayin and Hevel. When Kayin kills Hevel he becomes a *na'ad* – he is displaced, and his generations to follow will always be on the move.

Furthermore, the pasuk states וְטָמְאָה שְׁבַע יָמִים, that the women will be impure for seven days. In Kayin's case, Rashi explains that he has been a *na'ad* for seven generations. Moreover, in this week's parsha it says אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ – a woman conceives and gives birth. Why does it use the word תִּזְרִיעַ, to conceive? It is explained that a *zera*, a seed, is also used in Bereishit with reference to the Tree of Knowledge and the punishment for eating from the tree. When Chava eats from the tree, her punishment is painful childbirth. Adam's punishment is that the earth will be cursed because of him. Parshiyot Tazria and Berieshit both contain the idea of planting, birth, and *niddah* for a period of seven days/generations. Is the story of Bereishit an overarching template for everyone else, with Chava's birth acting as a model for all births?

The birth of Chava's children came from pain and led to pain. Her one son killed her other son, and after seven generations of being a *na'ad*, Kayin was killed as well. Thus, with every childbirth there is a possibility of death, and many hours when the mother and baby's lives are in danger. Therefore, after giving birth a mother is impure due to her encounter with death (*tumat met* is one of the main reasons people are impure).

From this week's parsha we gain a better understanding that every word in the Torah is there for a reason, and Hashem did not make a mistake. Hashem purposefully used the words *niddah* and *zera* to explain the process of childbirth to connect these laws to the earlier stories of Chava and Kayin and Hevel. Even though there are times we might not understand something, Hashem has done it for purpose and we must always trust Him. Have a good shabbos.

Words Matter

Zev Hirsch ('23)

Parshat Tazria begins with discussing the halachot of a woman who gives birth. Once a woman gives birth, she becomes *tamei*, but after one week for a newborn male and two weeks for a newborn female, she takes on a new lesser status of *tumah*. Finally, after thirty three more days for a newborn male and sixty-six days for a newborn female, she brings a *korban* and becomes *tahor*. The Torah describes her *korban*:

וּבְמִלֵּאת יְמֵי טְהָרָהּ לָבָן אוֹ לְבַת תָּבִיא כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן שָׁנָה
לְעֹלָה וּבֶן יוֹנָה אוֹ תֹר לַחֲטָאת אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֶל
הַכֹּהֵן וְהִקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה' וְכָפַר עָלֶיהָ וְטְהָרָהּ מִמַּקְדָּר דָּמֶיהָ
זֹאת תֹּרַת הַיִּלָּדֹת לְזָכָר אוֹ לְנִקְבָּה

“On the completion of her period of purification, for either a son or daughter, she shall bring to the kohen, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. He shall offer it before Hashem and make expiation on her behalf; she shall then be clean from her flow of blood. Such are the rituals concerning she who bears a child, male or female” (Vayikra 12:6-7).

Along with a standard *korban olah*, the mother also has to bring a *korban chatat*. If a *korban chatat* is only for someone who accidentally violates an *aveirah*, then why does the Torah make all women who give birth bring a *korban chatat*? What did all

these women do wrong?

The students of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai asked him this very question, which is recorded in the gemara (Niddah 31b):

שאלו תלמידיו את רבי שמעון בן יוחי מפני מה אמרה תורה יולדת מביאה קרבן אמר להן בשעה שכורעת לילד קופצת ונשבעת שלא תזקק לבעלה לפיכך אמרה תורה תביא קרבן

“The students of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai asked him: For what reason does the Torah say that a woman after childbirth brings an offering? He said to them: At the time that a woman crouches to give birth, her pain is so great that she impulsively takes an oath that she will not engage with her husband ever again, so that she will never again experience this pain. Therefore, the Torah says that she must bring an offering for violating her oath and continuing to engage with her husband.”

This answer seems extreme; most women aren't making actual vows during their childbirth. Even if some women are thinking this during childbirth, and even if they speak it out loud, it is only for a short time period during an extreme period of pain. Clearly, the Torah is teaching the lesson of being careful with our words. If the Torah obligates all women to bring a *korban chatat* just because they might have violated an oath that they blurted out only for a brief moment in extreme pain, how much more so would the Torah obligate all of us for not being careful with our words. Many people often use phrases like “I swear” non-literally, but the Torah is teaching us here that swearing phrases, even if meant non-literally, should never be spoken. On a deeper level, the Torah is teaching us here to be completely honest with our words as even under the most oppressive circumstances, the Torah holds us accountable for dishonesty. Even if something isn't a full-on lie, if it is missing information or twisted it is still considered a lie, and we should all be *zoche* to try and stop ourselves from these practices.

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