

Summary

TAZRIA

The Torah commands a woman to bring a *Korban* after the birth of a child. A son is to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life.

The Torah introduces the phenomenon of *Tzara'as* (often mistranslated as leprosy) -- a miraculous disease that attacks people, clothing and buildings to awaken a person to spiritual failures. A Kohen must be consulted to determine whether a particular mark is *Tzara'as* or not. The Kohen isolates the sufferer for a week. If the disease remains unchanged, confinement continues for a second week, after which the Kohen decides the person's status. The Torah describes the different forms of *Tzara'as*. One whose *Tzara'as* is confirmed wears torn clothing, does not cut his hair, and must alert others that he is ritually impure. He may not have normal contact with people. The phenomenon of *Tzara'as* on clothing is described in detail.

METZORA

The Torah describes the procedure for a *Metzora* (a person afflicted with *Tzara'as*) upon conclusion of his isolation. This process extends for a week, and involves *korbanos* and immersions in the *mikveh*. Then, a Kohen must pronounce the *Metzora* pure. A *Metzora* of limited financial means may substitute lesser offerings for the more expensive animals. Before a Kohen diagnoses that a house has *Tzara'as*, household possessions are removed to prevent them from also being declared ritually impure. The *Tzara'as* is removed by smashing and rebuilding that section of the house; if it reappears, the entire building must be razed. The Torah details those bodily secretions that render a person spiritually impure, thereby preventing his contact with holy items, and how one regains a state of ritual purity.

If Man makes his soul the essence of his being, then he precedes all Creation.

Commentaries

WHO'S FIRST?

"When a woman conceives..." (12:2)

If Man is worthy - if he makes his soul the essence of his being - then he precedes all Creation. For it was the spirit of Man that hovered over the depths even before the creation of light. But if he is not worthy - if he glories in his physical dimension - then in terms of the *physical* precedence of Creation, even the mosquito preceded him... For this reason the Torah deals with the laws of purity in Man after the laws of purity in animals: Just as the *physical* creation of Man follows that of the animals, so his laws are explained after the laws of the animals. This applies only when man behaves as nothing more than a sophisticated animal. However, if man relegates his physical side to his soul; if he fulfills the purpose of Creation by recognizing and serving his Creator, then he precedes all Creation.

(Based on the Midrash and Rashi)

TWO SIGNS

"And on the eighth day, the flesh of the foreskin shall be circumcised." (12:3)

The greatness of Shabbos can be seen from the fact that a boy is not given *Bris Mila* until he is eight days old - until he has experienced Shabbos. In other words, the reason that *Bris Mila* is performed on the eighth day after birth is so that the he can experience Shabbos before the *Mila*. Only by passing through the holiness of Shabbos, can he reach a level where he becomes fit to enter into the holiness of the Jewish People through *Bris Mila*.

(Yalkut Yehuda)

MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

"And on the eighth day, the flesh of the foreskin shall be circumcised." (12:3)

The custom at a *Bris* is to say to the parents "Just as he has been brought into the Covenant (*Bris*), so should he be brought to Torah, marriage and good deeds." Just as he has been brought into the *Bris*, which is now an inseparable part of him, thus also should all the other *mitzvos* of the Torah form an inseparable part of him.

(Iturei Torah)

STICKS AND STONES

“And he shall be brought to the Kohen.”

(14:3)

When a person speaks *Lashon Hara*, it indicates that he has no concept of the power of speech. It shows that he considers words to be insignificant in comparison to actions: As the nursery rhyme says “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. When a person speaks evil he awakes a prosecutor in Heaven not only against the target of his *Lashon Hara*, **but also against himself**. An angel with a ‘tape-recorder’ stands by the side of each one of us recording our every word.

In order to teach those who speak *Lashon Hara* the power of just one word, the Torah instructs that the offender be brought to the Kohen. But, even as he is on his way to the Kohen, his body covered with *Tzara’as* for all to see, until the Kohen actually pronounces the word “Impure!”, he is still considered totally pure. Similarly, he cannot regain his former status, even though his disease has healed completely, until the Kohen again pronounces him to be spiritually pure. From this the speaker of *Lashon Hara* is taught to reflect on the power of each and every word. **For with one word, he can be made an outcast, and with one word he can be redeemed.**

(Based on *Ohel Yaakov*)

Haftorah: Rosh Chodesh Yishayahu 66:1-24

When Rosh Chodesh occurs on Shabbos, the regular Haftorah is replaced by a special Haftorah - the last chapter of the Book of Yishayahu (Isaiah). This chapter was chosen because of its penultimate verse which links Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh: “*And it shall be that, from New Moon to New Moon, and from Shabbos to Shabbos, all flesh shall come and prostrate themselves before Me, said Hashem. (66:23)*” This verse is also repeated after concluding the reading of the Haftorah.

Every New Moon is a summons to Israel to renew and rejuvenate itself. Every Shabbos is a call to show practical proof of our homage to Hashem by ceasing from *melacha* (prohibited work). But there will come a time when not only Israel will be called to offer their willing service to Hashem...

“*And I will establish a distinctive sign amongst them and send refugees from them to the nations to ...Yavan, to the most distant lands that have not heard My Fame, nor have seen My Glory, and they will inform the nations of My Glory.” (66:19)*

Yavan/Greece is the nation charged with the task of elevating the lowly and un-refined nations through culture. But culture is not an end in itself. It is only a preliminary stage. After *Yavan/Greece*, it is *Shem/the Jews* who will show mankind the path to elevate itself to an awareness of what is good and true; to pay homage to what is *morally* beautiful; to lead the nations to the height of Man’s calling.

The ‘uniformity’ in thought that rules the actions and intellect of *Greece* is ultimately a fulfillment of Hashem’s plan. For through this love of uniformity, the nations will be united and they will finally come to perceive the ‘One-ness’ of the Creator.

This unified mankind will become the encircling vessel that will contain the pure *mincha* offering that is the Jewish People. Then the nations will recognize Israel’s role as the priests of mankind, just as the *Levi’im* are the priests of Israel. The realization of this goal is something absolutely certain. Then every New Moon and every Shabbos will not only bring to Israel a call for renewal of *kedusha* (holiness) of acknowledging Hashem in free-willed devotion, but all mankind will also hear and heed this call.

(Adapted from Rabbi S. R. Hirsch)



Insights into the *Zemiros* sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Tzur Mishelo Achalnu - ~~Uft~~ Uan run
The Rock, from Whose food we have eaten

asj rha rhaboau, tkn` iuhm rhg ,asenv vbch

Yibaneh hamikdash, ir Tziyon t'malay, v'sham nashir shir chadash

“May the Sanctuary be rebuilt, the City of Zion replenished and there shall we sing a new song.”

The Midrash calls attention to a connection between the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the songs of praise sung by Israel to its G-d. In *Tehillim* 147, which we say each morning, we quote King David’s words that “it is good to sing to our L-rd ... Hashem builds Jerusalem and gathers in the dispersed of Israel.” Jerusalem, concludes the *Midrash*, will only be rebuilt with the praise and *zemiros* we sing to Hashem.

There is also contained in this phrase the idea that when the final redemption takes place none of the old songs will be adequate for expressing our joy and a “new song” will have to be composed.

Our singing of *zemiros* today is only a rehearsal for the “new song” which will herald the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash*, soon in our days.

Parshas Tazria/Metzora

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