

THE HAGGADA SAYS WE EAT MATZA TODAY TO RECALL GOD'S SALVATION WHICH RESTRICTED THE DOUGH FROM RISING. WHY THEN WERE THE JEWS IN EGYPT TOLD TO EAT THE MATZA, BEFORE THE SALVATION?

Discussed in next week's article: "The Dough's Significance"

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Parashas Tazria

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Speak to Bnai Yisrael and say that when a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be ritually unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during the separation caused by menstruation." (VaYikra 12:2)

Our parasha introduces an elaborate discussion of the laws governing ritual impurity – tumah.

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The Punishment of Leprosy

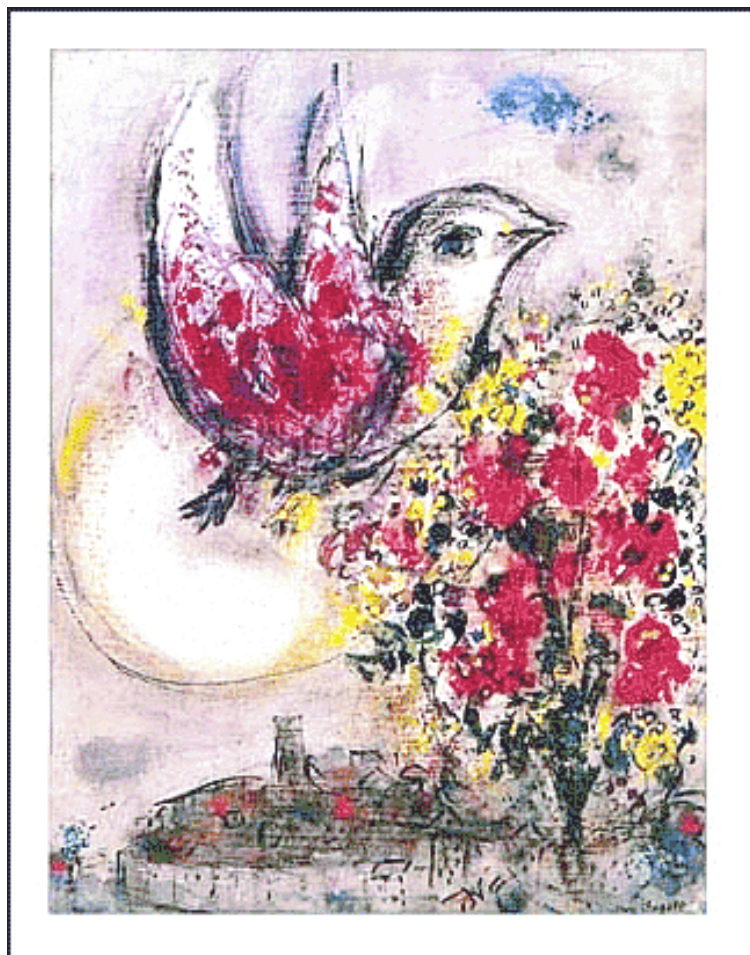
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Torah teaches of the punishment of leprosy, or Tzaraas, which visits a person on account of his speaking "Lashon Hara", derogatory remarks concerning another. Leprosy visits the person in stages. At first, leprosy attaches itself to the person's home. If the person heeds the warning and repents, it is gone. If not, it excels towards the person's garments. Again, if one repents, it is gone. If not, it finally attaches to the person's body.

What is the purpose of this progression, and why these objects? Additionally, the Torah states that for one to be atoned, one must bring two birds, one is slaughtered, and its blood is caught in a bowl. The live bird is dipped therein along with a branch of hyssop and myrtle, and the live, bloodied bird is now set free over an open field.

On the surface, this seems barbaric, or at the least, unintelligible. However, as we know God is the Designer of the Torah, and "all its ways are pleasant", there must be a rational explanation for these required practices, and for the objects used in attempting to correct the person who spoke viciously.

In order to understand how



"mida k'neged mida" (measure for measure) works in this case, we must first understand the crime. Speaking derogatorily against another has at its source, the desire for self affirmation of one's greatness. An insecure person will usually be found degrading others. In his mind, he know feels higher in comparison to the ridiculed party. A secure individual however, will not

concern himself with others, as this doesn't effect his self estimation. Being secure, another's level has no effect on his status. What then is the remedy for this egomaniac type of personality? To diminish his imagined grandeur with a dose of alienation. Part of the need to elevate oneself is the desire to be loved by others. When this cannot be, as a leper is banished outside

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The Punishment of Leprosy

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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the camp of the Israelites, he is faced with the fact that he is not the great image he conjured, and he must eat his words of scorn.

God however tries to avoid the worst by hinting to the person that he has done wrong. God doesn't send leprosy to the body first. He initially uses other vehicles with which the person identifies, viz., his home, and his clothing. God commences with the home, as this is further removed from the person, but related enough to him so as to awaken him. There's something distasteful in him that he should delve into. If the person is obstinate, God sends the leprosy to a closer object, his garments. This is more closely tied to one's identity, and is more effective. But if not heeded to, God finally delivers leprosy to his body, which is undeniably him. We see from here God's mercy, and intelligence in using objects which we identify with.

Parenthetically, these three objects, namely the house, clothes and body, are exactly where Mezuzah, Tzitzis, and Tefilin abide. These are also tied to the idea of identification, but from a different angle. Since God desires that one place their trust in Him, and not in their own strength, God created these three commands to redirect where one places their trust. Mezuzah reminds one not to invest too much reliance in his home, as God should be recognized as the True Protector. The home is correctly viewed as a haven from the elements. But God desires that we act above the norm, meaning, that we have trust in His shelter. So we place a reminder on the doorway, which is the best place for us to be reminded of God, as a doorway receives most of the

activity of a home. We are urged not to place too much importance on our dress, and therefore are commanded to wear tzitzis, fringes. Clothing again is an area where people derive identity, as people wear different styles to express themselves. Lastly, but most closely tied to our self identity is our bodies. One is most effected when something happens to his body, even if no pain is suffered. This is due to our false definition of what "man" is. Society tells us man equals his body. The Torah tells us that man equals intellect and love of God. Hence, we are commanded to wear tefilin. A reminder placed on our bodies that we should not invest too much worth here either.

These three, the home, clothes, and body are the three main areas where one identifies, and thus, the three areas where God saw it fit to place reminders that God alone should be Who we depend on.

Returning to the parsha, what is the idea behind the two birds? I believe that besides correcting the person's flaw of overestimation, he must also realize the damage done to the other. Rashi states that birds in specific are brought, as they chirp, to make clear that the crime had to do with his "chirping" like a bird. The one bird (resembling the sinner) is dipped in the blood of the other bird (resembling the one humiliated by the speech) and let free over a field. This is to demonstrate that just as this bloodied bird is irretrievable, so is his evil, "bloody speech" irretrievable. As you cannot catch the same bird twice, so also he cannot retract his words which were let loose on the world. The damage is done, the "bird is loose". This will hopefully give recognition to the person who spoke destructively and make clear his crime.

The birds acting as atonement teaches that knowing one's sin is the first step to forgiveness. ■

Pants and Orthodoxy

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I read your new article Learning from Other religions.

Unfortunately, your position is not so clear. Orthodox Judaism has become an imitation of Catholic abstinence. The rabbis - whether you regard them as infallible sages or not - have added restriction upon restriction, (in sharp contrast to the Torah's "lo Tosiphu" - "do not add to the Torah"), and made all contact before marriage illegal, as well restricting what the Torah permits in marriage. Today, many Jews are having problems finding spouses, and the insane orthodox pronounce baseless religious standards, which make it even harder to find a spouse, ruling out many good Jewish souls. (example, the false restriction against women wearing pants!).

Mesora: "Pant's" are not prohibited. What the Torah prohibits is men dressing in women's clothing, and women dressing like men. This is to rightfully diminish promiscuity, thereby focusing life on matters more important than the sexual. The Torah also prohibits immodest dress, which many women's snug slacks violate.

I would add that if orthodox Jews place more importance on clothing, than on a woman's internal make up, her true character, then they are foolish. An intelligent person seeking marriage should select a fine woman who may presently wear snug pants, over a woman in skirts possessing a lousy value system. "A ring of gold in the snout of a pig; (so too) is a beautiful woman with a putrid character." (Proverbs, 11:22)

Your comment about "baseless religious standards" is actually, baseless. Study the account where Amnon raped his sister Tamar. Restrictions occurred after this event, well based on such a tragic event. We don't follow the abstinence of other religions, but rather the moderation of Judaism. The Rabbis have authority from

the Torah to make 'fences' for existing laws and not to create new laws. By this guide they functioned meticulously.

Reader: In effect, what you guys have created is a catholic style abstinence for many, who have difficulty in finding frum partners. Every frummer is judgmental of others, and has a shopping list which they pick up in Yeshiva. In a sense, the rabbis are responsible for intermarriage, since finding a Jewish spouse is prevented by all the artificial hurdles created by rabbis who have decided to increase their power by making up new laws. Is that really G-d's Will?

Mesora: Your intermarriage statement too is baseless. At worst, the man can marry a less observant, but Jewish girl.

Again, there is no law against pants. I agree with your other comment though. We should not follow today's over-religious Jews who create shopping lists of absurdities, ruling out anything but a carbon copy of themselves. What a clear sign of insecurity.

The nonsense that Jews adhere to today is truly a crime: If a young man doesn't have a certain type of hat, or he has a sister who is not religious, or if a girl is divorced, if someone is a convert,...all such concerns are irrelevant to a person's true perfection. People are completely wrong to ruin a match based on such issues. In fact, a convert displays much greatness. Did God care that Ruth was a Moabite woman? No. She was so perfected, that God selected her seed to be not only our greatest leaders, King David and King Solomon, but our messiah is a direct descendant from Ruth. A gentile.

True Rabbis adhere carefully to God's word. If you hear of someone - "Rabbi" or otherwise - who reinforces foolish dating criteria, insist that they stop creating issues which don't exist according to the Torah. By adhering carefully to Torah law, both written and Rabbinic, you will be guided to the most healthy lifestyle.

Follow God's ideals, not today's foolish Jews. ■

Parashas Tazria

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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The parasha begins with a description of the tumah caused by childbirth. The parasha then continues with a discussion of the laws regarding the tzara'at. Tzara'at is an affliction that is accompanied by tumah. One of its forms is a white discoloration of the skin. However, tzara'at can also appear upon clothing and houses. These versions of tzara'at are also associated with tumah. The commentaries raise an interesting question regarding this discussion of tumah. Sefer VaYikra deals primarily with sacrifices and laws regulating the conduct of the Kohanim. Why are the laws of tumah inserted into this discussion? Various answers are offered.

One possibility is that the Kohanim are responsible to examine people, garments and homes for tzara'at. Only a Kohen can declare that tzara'at exists. The Sefer deals with the duties of the Kohanim. Therefore, it is appropriate to include these laws in Sefer VaYikra. Nachmanides suggests a number of explanations. One is that a person experiencing tzara'at and some of the other forms of tumah must bring a sacrifice as part of the purification process. The discussion of the tumah serves as an introduction to the laws governing these sacrifices. However, there is another more basic reason for the including this discussion of tumah in Sefer VaYikra. This association between tumah and sacrifices is not only found in the Torah. Maimonides also consistently connects these two areas of law. His Mishne Torah is divided into fourteen separate books. The eighth is the Book of Service. This book discusses the Temple, the duties of the Kohanim and Leveyim, and some of the sacrifices. The next book is the Book of Sacrifices. This book continues the discussion of sacrifices. This book is followed by the Book of Taharah. This book deals with the various forms of tumah and their removal. As in the Torah, the tumah is associated with

the Temple and sacrifice. In his Sefer HaMitzvot, Maimonides provides a short description of each of the six hundred thirteen mitzvot. Maimonides does not list the commandments in the order they occur in the Torah. Instead, he follows an order of his own invention. This order apparently reflects Maimonides' views on the connections between the various mitzvot. Here too, Maimonides associates the same three areas of law. The commandments concerning the Temple are followed by the mitzvot governing the behavior of the Kohanim. These are followed by the mitzvot of the sacrifices. Then, the mitzvot dealing with tumah are enumerated. It is clear that Maimonides feels that the laws of tumah are closely associated with the Bait HaMikdash. What is the connection?

A careful analysis of Maimonides' list of commandments reveals an important concept. Maimonides lists the construction of the Temple as the twentieth positive command. This command is followed by the mitzvot most basic to the Temple. These include the commandments describing the daily services and sacrifices. These are numbered as mitzvot 25 through 30. These commandments are followed by the mitzvot restricting the access of those who are in a state of tumah. These individuals cannot enter the Bait HaMikdash. This order suggests that the sanctity of the Mikdash is composed of two components. First, the Mikdash is designated as a place for Divine worship and service. Second, it is a place that must be free of all tumah. This understanding of the Temple's sanctity is the foundation of Maimonides' order. Maimonides begins with the commandment to create a Temple. The Temple has a unique sanctity. Maimonides then lists the commandments that define this sanctity. First, he lists the commandments regarding daily service. These commandments create the sanctity of the Mikdash as a place of Divine service. Next, Maimonides turns to the other aspect of the Temple's sanctity. It is a place unpolluted by any tumah. Maimonides defines this sanctity by listing the commandments that restrict those in a state of tumah from entry to

the Temple.

We can now easily understand the reason that Maimonides associates the laws of tumah with the Temple. These laws are a direct consequence of the sanctity of the Temple. The Temple must be free of tumah. This requirement is the basis for all commandments governing tumah. In fact, without the sanctity of the Temple, tumah is meaningless. It has no significance. However, once the sanctity of the Temple exists, tumah has meaning. A person who is in a state of tumah is prohibited from entering the Bait HaMikdash. The inclusion of the laws of tumah in Sefer VaYikra is now easily explained. Sefer Shemot discussed the building of the Mishcan. The Mishcan was the first Temple. Sefer VaYikra discusses the two aspects of the Tabernacle's sanctity. It describes the sacrifices and the laws of tumah. Both areas of law are a direct result of the Mishcan's sanctity.

"Speak to Bnai Yisrael saying: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male child she shall be impure for seven days. As in the days of the separation during her period she shall be impure." (VaYikra 12:2)

This pasuk explains that after giving birth a woman is ritually unclean for seven days. There is a fascinating teaching from our Sages relating to the pasuk. They explain that the pasuk alludes to the factors influencing the gender of the child. The Sages maintained that the process of conception required that seed from the female be joined with seed from the male. This pasuk describes the birth of a male child. The reference to the woman conceiving describes the seed of the woman entering the womb prior to the seed of the husband. Our Sages explained that if the seed from the female enters the womb first, the child is destined to be male. If the husband's seed is present first, a baby girl will be born. This theory does not correspond with today's understanding of the reproduction process. How should we regard such teachings? Are we to reject modern science? Are we to deny the validity of our Sages' theories?

The Torah Temima helps respond to this dilemma. He explains that the

Sages based their theory upon the scientific knowledge of the times. The intention of the Sages was not to indicate that our pasuk is the source of their conclusion. Instead, they saw, in a pasuk, an allusion to the concept they had uncovered from science. The Torah Temima provides an interesting proof to his claim. The Talmud offers an alternative source to which this rule of reproduction can be related. In listing the children of Yaakov, the Chumash refers to Dina as Yaakov's daughter, rather than as Leya's child. The Sages explain that the male children are attributed to Leya. This is because they resulted from her seed preceding that of Yaakov. Dina is referred to as Yaakov's daughter based upon the same reasoning. This female child was a result of Yaakov's seed entering the womb first. The Torah Temima points out that this source cannot be a derivation of the Sages' theory. He bases this observation upon another teaching of the Sages. Dina was conceived as a male child. Leya prayed that the sex of the child be reversed. Her prayers were answered and Dina was born. If the pasuk is a derivation, it suggests a theory of gender determination completely contrary to the theory of our Sages. The father contributed the first seed and a male child was conceived! Only through miraculous intervention was the gender reversed and a female baby born. This suggests that the intention of our Sages is not to derive a biological principle from either source. The principle is based upon scientific knowledge. The sources are merely regarded as possible allusions to the idea.

"And the Kohen shall see. And the tzara'at has covered all of his skin, then he shall declare the afflicted person clean. As long as he has turned completely white, he is clean." (VaYikra 13:13)

This pasuk discusses the affliction of tzara'at. Tzara'at can afflict various parts of the body. This passage deals with Tzara'at appearing upon the skin. Tzara'at is described as a white discoloration. The affliction is not regarded as a disease of physical origin. It is the result of spiritual impurity. It can only be identified by the Kohen. If the Kohen declares the ailment to be tzara'at, the person

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Parashas Tazria

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becomes a metzora and is unclean. A person whose skin is generally healthy but a small portion is afflicted with tzara'at is unclean. However, a person completely covered by the affliction is considered clean. This seems somewhat odd. A small blotch of tzara'at is adequate to render a generally, healthy person unclean. Yet, a person covered with the affliction from head to toe is clean! This paradox can be explained through an analysis of the definition of tzara'at.

Tzara'at is an affliction of the skin. It must exist in contrast to healthy skin. This contrast is essential to the definition of tzara'at. Without the contrast, tzara'at does not exist. Therefore, a person completely covered with the affliction is not deemed unclean. There is no contrast. The criteria for tzara'at have not been met. The issues can also be viewed at a deeper level. Let us begin by considering another issue. A person afflicted with the discoloration of tzara'at is immediately brought to the Kohen. After examination, the Kohen must determine the status of the individual. This decision has various ramifications that are discussed in the parasha. It is sufficient to note that advanced tzara'at is far more serious than the preliminary form of the affliction. Tzara'at of the skin is evaluated on the basis of three symptoms. Any one of these symptoms indicates that the tzara'at is advanced. One of the symptoms is a discoloration of the hair in the affected area. This discoloration is a change from the natural color to white. The presence of white hair is an indication of advanced tzara'at. Imagine a person finds a white blotch upon the skin. The person sees that white hair is present. May the person remove the white hair before consulting the Kohen? This is prohibited. Nonetheless, if the law is violated and the hair is removed, the intervention is effective. The Kohen must evaluate

the person as he or she appears. At the time the person appears before the Kohen, the white hair is not present. This might seem a little odd. The Torah is creating a tremendous temptation. The metzora has the opportunity to remove the hair before appearing before the Kohen. The intervention is effective. Yet, the metzora is expected to refrain from taking this step! In order to respond to these issues, we need to understand the function of this affliction.

Tzara'at is a Divine punishment. It is attributed to lashon hara – tale bearing and gossip. The affliction is a warning designed to encourage repentance. The tzara'at cannot be treated medically. Only spiritual improvement cures the disease. The affliction cannot be relieved until the person is declared unclean and begins the process of repentance and spiritual cleansing. This is adequate motivation to prevent a person from removing the signs of tzara'at. Little will be gained through the intervention. Much will be lost. True, the intervention will influence the declaration of the Kohen. However, the affliction will continue unabated. The person can only begin the process of purification after the declaration of the Kohen. In other words, one must first accept the status of being unclean. Then one may begin the process of purification. This provides a deeper understanding of the law governing the person completely covered with the affliction. The person is not declared unclean. This is not a leniency. Until the person is declared unclean, the process of purification cannot begin. The affliction will continue. Only after a healthy portion of skin appears, can the person be identified as a metzora. With this declaration, the process of repentance and purification can begin.

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, Introduction. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, Introduction. Rav Baruch HaLeyve Epstein, Torah Temimah on Sefer VaYikra 12:2. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at 10:1. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at, 10:2. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at, 16:10.

Digging for Oil

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Dear Mesora, I am a petroleum engineer and since graduating have read the quote in your site: "To quote the first Mishna in Chap. II, Talmud Chagiga, "If man ponders four things, it is better that he was never created (they are) what is above the earth, what is below, what came before the Earth, and what succeeds it". "

In my opinion this is saying that if I by trade am require to look beneath the earth in order to find Oil and Gas then I am perhaps taking myself from this world and better that I not have been born. I know there are jews in this business so I await your comment in anticipation of adding to my sense of approval by G-d in my future endeavours.

Thanks in advance. Sincerely yours,
Michael

Mesora: Michael, This quote refers to that which is out of man's capabilities, and therefore foolish to involve oneself in. In such a case, man's life is worthless, as stated by the mishna. However, digging for oil, archeology and occupations that are well within our capabilities are certainly permitted, and even sanctioned by God when He said "subdue it" (the world), when instructing Adam to harness all the world's good.

"If you seek it out like silver, and chase after it (Torah) like buried treasures, then you will understand the fear of God, and the knowledge of God will you find." (Proverbs) Keep digging, not just for oil, but for more knowledge! □

Non-Kosher Foods & Bodily Damage

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: In Rabbeinu Bachye ben Asher's "Kad haKemach," (Pesach Section A, about three fourths of the way through) he states, "the foods which the Torah prohibited, damage the

body and engender within the soul cruelty and an evil disposition." He seems to imply that non-kosher foods have a physical effect on the body. I don't see how you can read "mazikin et ha'guf" - "damaging the body" to be referring to anything other than the physical body. How can this be true?

Mesora: Damage to the body here, refers not to a damaging "substance". Pork is no more damaging than Kosher foods. The damage here refers to the creation of strong bonds to emotions by giving in to them. Not following the Torah's restrictive laws - keeping Kosher for example - creates an unruly state in man. He has no restraint on his desires. This is quite damaging. Such an individual will experience emotion flare-ups. "The wicked are turbulent as the sea..." (Isaiah, 57:20) Such individuals are less capable of exerting self control because they do not know how, nor have they trained themselves in such control. They will surely suffer the consequences of responding instinctually to life's challenges, as opposed to responding with calm, controlled and thought out decisions.

Eating pork in specific circumstances is not prohibited. Startling as this may sound, it is based on a basic "nullification" principle in Kashrus laws. This means if there is less than one sixtieth of non Kosher substance in a mixture, the entire mixture is permissible. Even though one definitely ingests the substance of pork, the pork is nullified in such a proportion. This teaches that the eating of a mixture including pork, is not "halachikly" the same as eating an object called "pork". The Torah prohibition is not to eat an object called pork. But when eating an entire mixture with acceptable proportions of ingredients, it is permissible. One is eating a "mixture", not pork.

Torah could not permit ingesting pork if it was physically damaging, as you suggest. Even in a mixture, one would be ingesting a damaging substance, if we took Rabbeinu Bachye's statement literally. But in reality, pork in this proportion is permissible, due to Jewish laws. Pork is not damaging as a substance. The real damage is man not following Jewish law. By following these laws, we are using our minds and not reacting to an emotional impulse, which is the true damage referred to by this Rabbi. □