

# INSIGHTS

## Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

APRIL 21, 2018

This week's Insights is dedicated in memory of the Rebbetzin's mother, Sima Mindel Bas Yitzchak Gershon. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 25

6 IYAR

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

## A Day of Rectification

*If a woman conceives, and bears a male child; then she shall be impure for seven days; as in the days of her menstruation, shall she be impure. On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised (12:2-3).*

Rashi (ad loc) introduces this week's *parsha* with a curious statement: "R' Simlai stated, 'just as the creation of man came after all the different animals so too is his law explained after that of the animals.'" Presumably, Rashi is referring to the Torah's detailed description of which animals are to be used for sacrifices under what circumstances, and which animals may or may not be consumed.

It is a little difficult to understand how the verses above are a definitive description of the laws of man. What is unique about the concepts that are introduced here that Chazal refer to them as the law of man? Perhaps even more perplexing is the law itself. Childbirth is, perhaps, the single most important event in a person's lifetime. Why should this event create impurity and a separation between husband and wife?

Ohr Hachaim (ad loc) is bothered by the Torah's repetition that circumcision takes place on the eighth day. The *mitzvah* of circumcision was originally given to Avraham Avinu and is described in *Parshas Lech Lecha*. Why, asks the Ohr Hachaim, is there a need for it to be repeated here?

Targum Yonason Ben Uziel (ad loc), in translating the verse "on the eighth day the flesh of his skin shall be circumcised," makes a stunning addition to the *possuk* that actually changes the whole meaning of the verse. The Targum adds the words "she should become permitted." Therefore the *possuk* reads, "On the eighth day **she should become permitted and the child will have the flesh of his foreskin circumcised.**"

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In other words, the eighth day isn't referring to the age of the newborn, and it isn't a repetition of the laws given in *Lech Lecha*. The "eighth day" is referring to his mother; it is **her** eighth day. This addition to the *possuk* is referring to the teaching of Chazal as to why circumcision is on the eighth day: On the eighth day a woman can become purified and be with her husband once again. Since everyone is rejoicing in the childbirth we want the parents to be joyous as well and therefore they need to be permitted to each other.



This begins to explain the reason as to why these laws are referred to as the laws of man: On the sixth day of creation man and woman were created. But on that very same day man and woman both sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. This sin had terrible consequences, including the definitive separation between man and wife. The menstrual cycle, the pain of childbirth, and the competition for control of the relationship are all a direct result of the original sin.

This *parsha* begins to introduce the rectification of the original sin. The impurity that was brought into the world via the sin which is tangibly expressed in the menstrual cycle, process of childbirth, and male foreskin (Adam was created circumcised) are all discussed here. In other words, the Torah is defining the "law of man" as the efforts we make to address and rectify the original sin. This is the path for man to achieve his ultimate reason for being created, but it must begin with a reunification with his soulmate and ultimately a relationship with his creator.

# Dealing with Addictive Behavior

This week's *parsha* discusses the laws of *tzoraas*. The Midrash (Rus Rabbah 2:10) explains the purpose of the three types of *tzoraas*; 1) *tzoraas* of the body 2) *tzoraas* that appears on personal items such as clothing and 3) *tzoraas* that appears on the walls of one's home. The Midrash explains the progression: When a person engages in *lashon hora*, he is first punished by *tzoraas* appearing on the walls of his house. If he repents and desists from speaking *lashon hora* then it is cured. If, however, he continues this evil practice, *tzoraas* appears on his clothes, and if, after that, he still continues to speak *lashon hora* then he is afflicted with *tzoraas* on his body.

As discussed in a prior edition of INSIGHTS, *lashon hora* is considered by Chazal as a very severe transgression – as heinous as murder, adultery, and idol worship. Yet the punishment, *tzoraas*, seems to be a minor inconvenience. After all, the size of the *tzoraas* discoloration can be relatively small, around the size of a nickel. Such a discoloration on a house can be easily ignored or covered up. Similarly, *tzoraas* on one's clothes can also be easily hidden by discarding the clothing and *tzoraas* on the body can be hidden by wearing something to cover the discoloration, such as makeup.

While the process of abating *tzoraas*, once it is confirmed, is pretty involved and demeaning—in its extreme cases requiring quarantine and other strict measures—this “punishment” for

speaking *lashon hora* seems to be easily circumvented or at least delayed for a very long time. In other words, without the afflicted person's cooperation it is highly unlikely that *tzoraas* will be confirmed in a timely fashion. How is this an appropriate punishment for such a severe transgression?

The Torah is teaching us an incredible lesson in how we are to begin to approach solving certain character flaws. The Talmud (*Baba Basra* 165a) makes a remarkable statement: R' Judah said in the name of Rav: Most [people are guilty] of robbery, some

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are guilty of illicit relations, and all are guilty of *lashon hora*. The Talmud then clarifies that this refers to some shades of slander. Meaning, language not necessarily forbidden by the Torah but prohibited by the Rabbis for its resemblance to *lashon hora* or because it may lead to *lashon hora* (see *Sefer Chofetz Chaim, Hilchos Lashon Hora, klal 9* for a thorough discussion of *Avak Lashon Hora*).

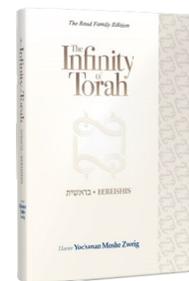
In any event, Chazal are clearly telling us that *lashon hora* is, at some level, an innate issue for every single person. This means that everyone has to struggle with this temptation and anyone that has studied the laws of *lashon hora* knows how difficult it is to overcome this temptation. The Torah gives us the most successful approach to solving character flaws: We have to

own up to it by accepting that it is useless to try and ignore the temptation. We must face the fact that we are trapped by this addictive behavior and actively work on ourselves to resolve this serious issue.

It is exactly for this reason that *tzoraas* is the most appropriate punishment. It is absolutely true that it is hardly ever diagnosed without the guilty party's cooperation. That is **exactly** the point of the punishment, until one is ready to own up to his “addiction” he will **never** be able to defeat it. We need his cooperation to determine *tzoraas* because only then is he beginning to own up to his failings. Without this step he will never be able to stop speaking *lashon hora*.

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