

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Rochel bas Yosef.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS TAZRIA

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."

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 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. Thus, 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



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achieve his ultimate reason for being created but it must begin with a reunification with his soulmate and ultimately a relationship with his creator.



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Seeing is Not Believing

All the days that the affliction is upon him he shall remain impure. He is impure and he shall stay in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside of the camp (13:46).

In this week's *parsha*, the Torah introduces the laws of *tzora'as* – commonly mistranslated as leprosy due to the fact that *tzora'as* shares a similar symptom where white splotches appear on the skin of the afflicted.

In fact, *tzora'as* isn't merely a disease caused by a bacterial infection (which is what leprosy is); it is a very specific punishment sent from heaven for the sin of *loshon hora* (see Rashi in his comments on this *passuk*). The Torah first introduced this concept in *Parshas Shemos* when Moshe's hand turned white "like snow" from *tzora'as* (*Shemos* 3:6) and Rashi (ad loc) explains that it was because he spoke *loshon hora* on the Jewish people. Similarly, Miriam is afflicted with *tzora'as* when she spoke negatively about Moshe at the end of *Parshas Beha'aloscha* (*Bamidbar* 12:10).

Loshon hora is considered one of the worst sins a person can commit, as heinous as murder, adultery, and idol worship (*Talmud Arachin* 15b). Yet the punishment, *tzora'as*, seems to be a minor one. After all, the size of the *tzora'as* discoloration can be relatively small, around the size of a nickel. While the consequence of having *tzora'as* is related to the sin of *loshon hora* (see Rashi 13:46), it is difficult to understand how a relatively small mark on one's body is a fitting punishment. We know that Hashem punishes in a very strict system of *quid pro quo*, nothing more and nothing less than a transgression deserves. How is this small discoloration a proper punishment for the terrible sin of *loshon hora*?

One of the most famous photos of the 20th century was taken by famous war photographer Eddie Adams. The photo, named "Saigon Execution," depicted a general in the S. Vietnamese army

(America's ally) killing, in appalling cold blooded fashion, a Vietcong prisoner. Beyond the Pulitzer Prize that Eddie Adams won, this photo deeply contributed to the American public's conflict as to whether or not to support the Vietnam war.

The New York Times (when they still had a conscience) was extremely hesitant to publish his photo for it depicted the brutality of America's ally, and only consented to run it side by side with a photo of a child slain by the Vietcong. Nonetheless, Eddie Adams' photo was the one burned into the American psyche.

Yet, Adams himself lamented, "Two people died in that photograph: the recipient of the bullet and General Nguyen Ngoc Loan. The general killed the Vietcong; I killed the general with my camera. Still photographs are the most powerful weapons in the world. People believe them; but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths."

The actual circumstances from the incident (obviously not captured on film) were that the prisoner had just ambushed this general's regiment and murdered three of his soldiers. It was a hot and miserable day and tempers were running very high. The general, who actually had a reputation for compassion, made the decision to execute the prisoner for he feared he would lose control of his regiment who were furious that this Vietcong had just murdered three of their fellow soldiers. Because of the terrible backlash from that photo, the general was stripped of his command and discharged from the army. Eddie Adams felt so guilty that he supported him and his family until the end of his life.

Loshon hora, while technically true, is actually the most horrible kind of lie. *Loshon hora* is exactly like a photograph – a fleeting glimpse of a terrible act that a person committed. But what are the circumstances? Who is that person in reality? Is it fair to paint that person's entire being by that fleeting act; is that who they really are? No one is proud of every moment of his life (there is a well-known saying that no one growing up in the digital era will ever be elected to public office because there are photographs of just about everyone in compromising circumstances).

This is why the punishment for *loshon hora* is *tzora'as*. A little discoloration, even the size of a nickel, comes to define the whole person as a *metzora*. This is the perfect *quid pro quo*; for it is exactly what the person speaking *loshon hora* did – took a relatively small (when compared with a person's entire life) and embarrassing vignette and portrayed that to be the entirety of an individual's identity. So too *tzora'as*, a small discoloration, comes to define the entirety of the sinner.

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