

This week's *Parashah* introduces the laws of *Tzara'at*, an affliction that the *Gemara* (*Arachin* 16a) identifies as a punishment for certain anti-social sins--most famously, speaking *Lashon Ha'ra*. R' Eliezer Kashtiel *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Bnei David in Eli, Israel) observes: Of all forms of *Tum'ah* / ritual defilement, none has anywhere near as many verses devoted to it in the Torah as does the *Tum'ah* of *Tzara'at*. Likewise, none requires that the *Tamei* person be banished from the camp as a *Metzora* / person with *Tzara'at* is banished. Indeed, our Sages go so far as to say, "A *Metzora* is likened to a dead person," a statement not made about any other *Tamei* person.

R' Kashtiel continues: *Halachah* requires that a *Metzora* be banished from a walled city in *Eretz Yisrael*. A city's wall symbolizes that which protects it. We read in *Shir Ha'shirim* (8:10), "I am a wall," which our Sages interpret as a reference to Torah scholars, who are a city's true guardians. How so? Because Torah scholars care about the welfare the Jewish People, they devote their time and energy to bringing about unity, and they try to build bridges, notwithstanding the differences between individuals. That is what strengthens a community and gives it security. Hence, it is a "wall."

A *Metzora*--one who speaks *Lashon Ha'ra*--in contrast, does not know how to raise himself within the fabric of society. Instead, he feels the need to separate himself from it; to tear it apart. He seeks to divide, which destroys a city's security. Therefore, his place is outside the wall.

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## Pesach

R' Gedaliah Silverstone *z"l* (1871-1944; rabbi in Belfast, Ireland and Washington, D.C.) writes: One might ask, "Why do we rejoice on *Pesach*? Seemingly, the Exodus is ancient history, and we are once again oppressed and persecuted by the nations of the world. We left a 400-year subjugation in Egypt only to endure subjugation for thousands of years more!" In support of this question, R' Silverstone notes the *Gemara's* teaching (*Megillah* 14a) that we do not recite *Hallel* on *Purim* because, even after the *Purim* miracle, we were still subjects of King Achashveirosh. Likewise, as current events leave no doubt, we are still subjugated by anti-Semitic nations and forces today! Why, then, do we celebrate *Pesach*?

R' Silverstone explains: Our redemption from Egypt gives us hope in our present exile. Our Sages say that Egypt was hermetically sealed, and no slave ever escaped from there successfully. Moreover, our Sages teach that *Bnei Yisrael* in Egypt had fallen to the forty-ninth and lowest level of *Tum'ah* / spiritual defilement. Nevertheless, our Father in Heaven took us out from there miraculously, "with a strong hand and an outstretched arm." This gives us hope in our bitter exile, when we hear of pogroms in Europe and *Eretz Yisrael* and of the rise of the Nazis *ym"y* in Germany and Austria, when we hear of our brethren suffering horrible forms of death that even Rabbi Amnon did not imagine when he composed *U'netaneh Tokef!* Widows and orphans sit and cry at their *Pesach Seders*: "This is the same bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt!"

Despite all this suffering, R' Silverstone concludes, we know that *Hashem* redeemed us from Egypt with great wonders, and that knowledge gives us hope in the present exile. Therefore, we say wholeheartedly: "This year we are here, but next year we can be in *Eretz Yisrael*! This year we are slaves, but next year we can be free in *Eretz Yisrael*, which belongs to the People of *Yisrael* according to the Torah of *Yisrael*!"

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Korban Pesach* p.5-6)

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R' Mintzberg explains: When a *Mitzvah* appears more than once in the Torah, it is not merely a repetition or an opportunity to add new details. Rather, the context teaches us about an entirely new aspect of the *Mitzvah*.

For example, R' Mintzberg writes, the *Mitzvah* of *Tzitzit* appears twice in the Torah. In one place, *Tzitzit* are presented as a tool to remind us of the *Mitzvot* and of the Exodus, as we read (*Bemidbar* 15:39-41), "It shall constitute *Tzitzit* for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of *Hashem* and perform them . . . I am *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, Who took you out from the land of Egypt . . ." When the *Mitzvah* is repeated, there is no mention of these ideas. Rather, we read (*Devarim* 22:11-12), "You shall not wear *Sha'atnez* / combined fibers, wool and linen together. You shall make for yourselves twisted threads on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself." There, the Torah is not trying to remind us of the other *Mitzvot* or of the Exodus. It is teaching us that there is a "Jewish look," which includes not wearing *Sha'atnez* and wearing *Tzitzit*.

Likewise, the two mentions of circumcision in the Torah are teaching two different aspects of the *Mitzvah*. The first time the *Mitzvah* appears, it is in the context of forming a *Brit* / covenant with *Hashem*--the *Brit Milah*. In our *Parashah*, there is no mention of a *Brit*. Rather, circumcision is presented in the context of the schedule of a "Jewish childbirth"--among other events that take place on day seven, day fourteen, etc. [R' Mintzberg goes on to explain in detail why different words and phrases and various aspects of the *Halachot* of circumcision are found in one context or the other.]

(*Ben Melech Al Ha'Torah*)

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R' Kashtiel continues: The *Gemara* cited above teaches that an army's success in war depends on the purity of the people's speech. For example, *Yisrael's* King Achav was so evil that he has no share in the World-to-Come. Nevertheless, say our Sages, his forces were victorious in battle because his subjects were not tale-bearers. They were idolators, yes, but they did not speak *Lashon Ha'ra*, and that great merit protected them.

The inner strength to avoid divisiveness and *Lashon Ha'ra* is more important to our success than any weapon, R' Kashtiel concludes. Achieving this requires us to rise above divisions and differences and not to highlight the differences between us. Rather, we must maintain clean mouths that bring only joy and encouragement to others and that speak only of positive things. This will be our wall. (R' Kashtiel spoke these words during the *Sheloshim* for Major Eliraz Peretz *Hy"d*, who was killed in Gaza on 11 *Nissan* 5770 / March 26, 2010, and who, R' Kashtiel said, embodied these qualities.)

(*Nefesh Ha'Shabbat*)

**"On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." (12:3)**

*Midrash Mechilta* teaches: We read (*Shmot* 15:1), "*Az yashir* / Then Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* sang this song . . ." The *Gematria* of "*Az*" (אז) equals eight, acknowledging that the Splitting of the Sea occurred in the merit of *Brit Milah*, which is performed on the eighth day. Thus we read (*Tehilim* 136:13), "*L'go'zer Yam Sufli'ge'zarim*" / "[Give thanks] to Him Who divided the Sea of Reeds into parts." In Aramaic, a *Mohel* is called a "*Gozer*." [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Aharon Lewin *z"l Hy"d* (the *Reisher Rav*; killed in the Holocaust) explains: Another *Midrash* relates that when Moshe approached to split the Sea, the Sea refused to split. It said, "I should split for you? I am greater than you, for I was created on the third day and you were not created until the sixth day!" [Until here from the *Midrash*]

What did the Sea mean? asks R' Lewin. Was it Moshe's will that the Sea to split? It was *Hashem* who told Moshe to split the Sea! Apparently, R' Lewin explains, the Sea was arguing that *Hashem* should have spoken to the Sea directly, just as He did on the third day of Creation, when He established the boundaries between the seas and dry land.

*Midrash Tanchuma* relates that the Roman general Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva: If *Hashem* wants men to be circumcised, why did He not create them that way? Rabbi Akiva answered that *Hashem* wants man to play a role in perfecting himself. We learn from this, writes R' Lewin, that *Hashem* desires mankind's participation in the world--especially the participation of righteous people. That answers, as well, the Sea's argument: Why did *Hashem* tell Moshe to split the Sea instead of telling the Sea directly that it should split? Because *Hashem* desires mankind's participation.

According to this, R' Lewin adds, the *Midrash* is understanding the verse in *Tehilim* quoted above not as saying, "[Give thanks] to Him Who divided the Sea of Reeds into parts," but rather as saying, "[Give thanks] to Him Who divided the Sea of Reeds for those who are circumcised." [That is only the *Midrashic* interpretation, however. Based on grammatical rules, the *P'shat* remains as translated at first.] (*Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun*)

R' Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg *z"l* (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) writes: Many commentaries wonder why our verse is not redundant, given that we already read (*Bereishit* 17:12), "At the age of eight days every male among you shall be circumcised."

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