

This week's *Parashah* opens with laws relating to childbirth. *Midrash Vayikra Rabbah*, quoted by *Rashi z"l*, comments: "Just as the formation of man took place after that of every cattle, beast and fowl when the world was created, so, too, the laws regarding man are set forth after the laws regarding cattle, beast and fowl," referring to the laws of *Kashrut* discussed in last week's *Parashah*.

R' Moshe Zuriel z"l (1938-2023; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Sha'alvim and a prolific author) writes: One of the ways for a person to avoid sinning is to be cognizant of his place in the world. *Midrash Rabbah* teaches: "The *Yetzer Ha'ra* does not walk at the side of the street, only in the center." In other words, the *Yetzer Ha'ra* pursues those who view themselves as worthy of attention, whether because of their physical beauty or the talents that they have. Thus, if one takes to heart that even gnats were created before he was, he increases his chances of avoiding sin.

R' Zuriel continues: Animals and birds can run or fly farther, faster, and with greater endurance than man can. They can care for themselves at younger ages--in many cases, soon after birth. They have stronger instincts about danger. The only attribute that a person has over an animal, R' Zuriel writes, is his intellect--but only if he uses that intellect. That means not living in the moment; rather, looking beyond the moment and understanding that one has a mission to fulfill during his relatively short time in this world.

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Shabbat

"Whomever recites 'Vy'chulu' (ויכחלו) on Friday night--it is as though he testifies that Hashem created His world in six days and rested on the seventh day." (*Shabbat* 119b)

We recite *Vy'chulu* in the *Amidah* on Friday night. After the *Amidah*, we recite *Vy'chulu* again. It should be said out loud and while standing.

(*Shulchan Aruch: O.C.* 268:1, 7)

The reason we recite *Vy'chulu* while standing is that we are testifying that *Hashem* created the world, and *Halachah* requires witnesses to stand when they testify in court.

(*Mishnah Berurah* 268:19)

R' Zvi Yisrael Thau *shlita* (founder of Yeshivat Har Ha'mor in Yerushalayim) writes, based on the writings of R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*): The testimony we give when we recite *Vy'chulu* is not merely that *Hashem* created the world. More than that, we testify that Creation has a purpose--indeed, a lofty, perfect, and liberating purpose.

We read (*Yeshayah* 43:10--in the *Haftarah* for *Parashat Bereishit*, where we read about Creation), "'You are My witnesses,' says Hashem." The Jewish People, by our very nature, testify that *Hashem* is "*Elokim*" / the Ultimate Power. A Jew gives this testimony whenever he lives his life properly, but especially by sanctifying *Shabbat*.

R' Thau continues: If existence were limited to the physical world that we perceive, if it could be summed up by the fixed laws of nature, then man could have no freedom [to develop spiritually]. *Shabbat* comes along and testifies--and, through it, we testify--that *Hashem* created the world of His own free will, with idealism, and out of His own infinite goodness. In doing so, He implanted freedom, idealism, and goodness in the world.

(*Am Mekadeshei Shevi'i* p.54)

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Pirkei Avot

“Beware of rulers, for they befriend someone only for their own benefit. They act friendly when it benefits them, but they do not stand by someone in his time of need.” (2:3)

R’ Shimon ben Zemach Duran z”l (1361–1444; Spain and Algeria; known as *Rashbatz*) writes: Shemayah already warned (*Avot* 1:10), “Do not become overly familiar with the government.” It appears to me, writes *Rashbatz*, that the difference between Shemayah’s teaching and this one is that the former is warning a person not to try to obtain a leadership position by becoming close to the government. In contrast, Rabban Gamliel’s message in our *Mishnah* is that even though it sometimes is necessary to develop relationships with government officials in order to lobby them or for other communal needs, be careful not to become so close to them that they get you to reveal your confidences to them. (Magen Avot)

R’ Ovadiah Seforno z”l (1470-1550; Italy) understands our *Mishnah* as a continuation of the one before it, which stated: “All who exert themselves for the community should exert themselves for the sake of Heaven.” To this, our *Mishnah* adds: However, when you do approach the government on behalf of the community, beware. Even though government officials will befriend you and make promises to you, do not rely on them, for they have only their own interests in mind. (Seforno)

R’ Yisrael Meir Lau *shlita* (former *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of Israel) notes that *Pirkei Avot* uses two different words when speaking of “rulers” and “government.” In our *Mishnah* and in Chapter 1, *Mishnah* 10, the term used is “*Rashut*.” In Chapter 3, *Mishnah* 2, we read, “Pray for the welfare of the *Malchut*.” The difference between the two words (and the resulting difference in the attitudes reflected by the various *Mishnayot*), R’ Lau writes, is that “*Malchut*” refers to a government of laws, while “*Rashut*” refers to a government that rules arbitrarily and based on whim. (Yachel Yisrael)

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R’ Zuriel adds: After Yosef interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams, the latter said to his entourage (*Bereishit* 41:38), “Could we find another like him?” Granted that Yosef could interpret dreams, but why did Pharaoh think that Yosef would make a good viceroy? R’ Zuriel answers: Yosef gave Pharaoh advice about planning for the future (*Bereishit* 41:33-36). Fools think only about the present, or they utter meaningless slogans about the future. Wise people, in contrast, use their intellects to plan realistically for the future. (Otzrot Ha’Torah)

“If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a *S’eit*, or a *Sapachat*, or a *Baheret*, and it will become a *Nega Tzara’at* / *Tzara’at* affliction on the skin of his flesh; he shall be brought to Aharon Ha’kohen, or to one of his sons the *Kohanim*.” (13:2)

R’ Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg z”l (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) writes: Many commentaries emphasize that *Tzara’at* is not a natural skin condition or a symptom of a physical illness; after all, clothing and houses cannot get sick, but they can have *Tzara’at*. Rather, as R’ Moshe ben Maimon z”l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: It is a sign and a wonder that *Hashem* did among the Jewish People when they merited such clear communication, to inform them when He was punishing them and distancing them.

R’ Mintzberg continues: Perhaps this is why *Tzara’at* is called a “*Nega*,” a word related to the word “*Negi’ah*” / “touching.” A person gets *Tzara’at* when *Hashem* “touches” him, i.e., when *Hashem* reaches out to convey His displeasure with the person. The *Gemara* (*Arachin* 16a) and *Midrash Rabbah* identify as many as ten sins that are punishable by *Tzara’at*, the best known and most common of them being speaking *Lashon Ha’ra*.

(Ben Melech Al Ha’Torah)

R’ Eliezer Kashtiel *shlita* (rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Eli, Israel) writes: The Torah devotes far more space to the *Tum’ah* of *Tzara’at* than to any of the other forms of *Tum’ah* that exist. In addition, *Tzara’at* is the only *Tum’ah* that requires a person to be banished from the city. And, our Sages say, “A *Metzora* (a person with *Tzara’at*) is like a dead person”--a harsh statement that is not made about any other form of *Tum’ah*!

R’ Kashtiel explains: It is not all cities that a *Metzora* is banished from; only walled cities. A wall is a city’s protection. Our Sages refer to Torah scholars as a city’s “wall,” for they, too, protect a city. What attribute of Torah scholars is it that offers this protection? It is the fact that, through studying Torah, people of different backgrounds and natures can find common ground. This unites the people of a city and protects them.

R’ Kashtiel continues: A *Metzora* [who was stricken because he spoke *Lashon Ha’ra*] does the opposite--he divides people and, thereby, strips them of the protection that unity offers. Therefore, his place is outside the wall, stripped of the protection of which his behavior deprived others.

R’ Kashtiel concludes: More than from any weapons system, our national strength comes from constantly striving to rise above our differences and to develop greater love for each other.

(B’nefesh Ha’Shabbat)