

The two *Parashot* read this week--*Tazria* and *Metzora*--are devoted primarily to the laws of *Tzara'at*. R' Nosson Yehuda Leib (Leibel) Mintzberg z"l (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) makes several observations about the order in which the various laws of *Tzara'at* are presented in our *Parashot*.

The Torah's presentation begins with the laws of *Tzara'at* that afflicts a person, then the laws of *Tzara'at* that afflicts a person's clothes, and finally the laws of *Tzara'at* that afflicts a person's house. However, in between the laws relating to clothing and the laws relating to houses, the Torah discusses the purification process and sacrificial offerings of a *Metzora* (person with *Tzara'at*). Perhaps, R' Mintzberg writes, this division is explained by the fact that the laws of *Tzara'at* on people and clothing applied even before *Eretz Yisrael* was conquered and settled, whereas the laws of *Tzara'at* on houses applied only afterwards.

He continues: *Tzara'at* on a person is described first because, although miraculous, it has a parallel in the natural world. In contrast, *Tzara'at* on clothing and houses does not parallel any natural occurrence, so it is listed later.

Also, *Midrash Rabbah* teaches that G-d, in His Mercy, strikes a person's home before his clothing, and his clothing before his person--the reverse of the order in which the three types of *Tzara'at* appear in the Torah. However, in order to highlight that *Tzara'at* is a punishment, the three types are listed in the order that hits "closest to home": first a person's body, then his clothes, then his house. (*Ben Melech Al Ha'Torah*)

Shabbat

"If you restrain your feet because of the *Shabbat*; refrain from accomplishing your own needs on My holy day; if you proclaim the *Shabbat 'Oneg'* / 'A delight,' the Holy One, *Hashem*, 'Honored One,' and you honor it by not engaging in your own ways, from seeking your needs or discussing the forbidden--then you shall be granted pleasure with *Hashem*..." (Yeshayah 58:13-14)

R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (1741-1804; *Dubno Maggid*) explains these verse with a parable:

A well-off man had three sons--call them: Reuven, Shimon, and Levi. Reuven was extremely wealthy, while Shimon lived in abject poverty. Reuven and Shimon both lived in a town some distance from their father and their much younger brother, Levi.

When it came time for Levi to marry, the father wrote to his sons Reuven and Shimon, inviting them to the wedding. "All expenses you incur for my honor will be reimbursed," he wrote.

Immediately, Reuven outfitted himself and his wife and children with new suits, shoes, and jewelry and loaded them all into his gilded carriage. Just as he was about to set out for the wedding, he sent for his brother, Shimon: "Quickly, bring your family and ride with me." And, so, Reuven and Shimon arrived at their father's home together--one in his new finery and the other in rags.

After several weeks at his father's home, Reuven announced that it was time for him to return to his business, and he presented his father with a bill for the clothing and jewelry his family had worn to the wedding. His father, however, said, "What do you want from me?"

"You promised to reimburse me!" Reuven said, but his father denied it. Reuven then pulled out his father's letter and argued, "You said right here that you would reimburse me!"

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Pirkei Avot

“Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five students . . . He told them: ‘Go out and discern which is the proper path to which a person should attach himself.’ . . . Rabbi Yehoshua replied, ‘A good friend.’ Rabbi Yose replied, ‘A good neighbor.’ . . .” (Ch.2)

R’ Yechezkel Sarna z”l (1890–1969; *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Chevron Yeshiva) asks: Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai’s students were pious and holy men! Why did they need good friends and good neighbors; could they not cling to G-d through meditating in seclusion upon His greatness?

We see, answers R’ Sarna, that having a good friend and a good neighbor is not merely an aid to strengthening oneself spiritually. Rather, it is an integral part of serving *Hashem*, and anyone who thinks he can navigate Torah study and *Yir’at Hashem* / reverence of G-d completely on his own is sadly mistaken. (*Dalio* Yechezkel II p.281)

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“Please read the letter carefully,” replied the father. “It says: ‘All expenses you incur for my honor will be reimbursed.’ Had you incurred all of those expenses for my honor, you would have outfitted your poor brother and his family as well. But you thought only of making a good impression yourself--for your honor, not mine.”

Similarly, says the *Dubno Maggid*, how can we test whether the delicacies we consume on *Shabbat* are a fulfillment of the *Mitzvah* of *Oneg Shabbat* or merely pursuits of personal pleasure? One indication is whether we share our *Shabbat* table with those in need.

The *Gemara* (*Beitzah* 15b) teaches that expenditures made for *Shabbat* do not count against a person’s annual income decreed on *Rosh Hashanah*. Rather, *Hashem* says, “Borrow on My account and I will repay you.” However, says the *Dubno Maggid*, one can count on that repayment only when his expenditures are in honor of *Shabbat*, which he demonstrates by including the needy at his meals, not when the expenditures are for his own gratification. As *Mishlei* (19:17) says, “One who is gracious to the poor has made a loan to *Hashem*, and He will pay him his reward.”

The *Dubno Maggid* adds: The above verses in *Yeshayah* provide another way of testing whether one is enjoying *Shabbat* for the sake of the *Mitzvah* or for his personal pleasure. If one is as careful in observing the *Shabbat* prohibitions listed in those verses--refraining from accomplishing one’s own needs on the holy day and honoring it by not engaging in one’s own ways and not seeking one’s needs or discussing the forbidden--as he is careful to enjoy delicacies, that is a sign that he is acting for the sake of the *Mitzvah*. (*Ohel Yaakov: Behar*)

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

R’ Avraham Zvi Kluger *shlita* (*Chassidic Mashpia* in Bet Shemesh, Israel) asks: All other *Mitzvot* are not binding on a person until the person has attained a certain level of *Da’at* / intellectual maturity--in the case of a boy, at age thirteen. Why is the *Mitzvah* of *Milah* done at the young age of eight days, when the participant is not even aware he is performing a *Mitzvah*?

R’ Kluger answers: Every other *Mitzvah* is a way for a Jew to declare: “I have a relationship with *Hashem*.” A person needs some level of *Da’at* to make that declaration. The *Mitzvah* of *Milah*, in contrast, reflects the *Brit* / covenant between *Hashem* and the Jewish People; it expresses a Jew’s inherent holiness, and his relationship with *Hashem* that is not affected by his own choices or even his awareness.

In addition, R’ Kluger continues: When the Torah “waits” until a child has attained some level of *Da’at* before obligating him or her in a *Mitzvah*, the Torah is effectively stating that even if the child does not understand the *Mitzvah* now, he or she will attain some understanding of it someday. However, the concept of a *Brit* / covenant between the Creator and one of His creations is beyond any rational explanation; even if we waited a million years, we would never understand it. *Hashem* has His reasons, but from our perspective, it just is. Therefore, there is no reason to postpone the *Brit Milah* until the child has *Da’at*.

(*La’brit Habeit* p.295-296)

“The Kohen shall look at it, and behold!--the affliction has changed to white, and the Kohen shall declare the affliction pure; it is pure.” (13:17)

Why didn’t the verse conclude simply: “The *Kohen* shall declare it pure”?

R’ Yisrael Ze’ev Halevi Horowitz z”l (1778-1861; rabbi of Sátoraljaújhely (“Uhel”), Hungary; later settled in Teveryah, *Eretz Yisrael*) explains: The verse is teaching that even after the *Tzara’at* affliction is technically gone and “the affliction is pure,” the aura of an “affliction” remains until the *Metzora* establishes guardrails to ensure that he does not repeat his sin; only then “It is pure.”

(*Lakachat Mussar*)

“This shall be the law of the Metzora on the day of his purification--Ve’huva/ and he shall be brought to the Kohen.” (14:2)

Midrash Tanchuma comments: “*Ve’huva*” is a contraction of “*Ve’hu-va*” / “And he is coming to the *Kohen*.”

What is the meaning of this *Derashah* / interpretation, which is unlike the literal translation of the verse? R’ Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal z”l *Hy”d* (1885-1945; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Pieštany, Czechoslovakia) explains:

Kohanim have the trait of loving peace and pursuing peace (see *Avot* 1:12). In contrast, a person who speaks *Lashon Ha’ra* causes divisions between spouses, between friends, and within the community in general. That is why he is punished with *Tzara’at* and is required to quarantine outside of the community. Therefore, “on the day of his purification,” when he wants to repent and rejoin the community, he must “come to the *Kohen*,” *i.e.*, he must adopt the attitude of the *Kohen* and become a person who loves peace and pursues it. (*Mishneh Sachir*)