



Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

פרשת החודש

BATting OUT OF ORDER

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There are four special shabbatot at this time of year named for the special maftirs that we read: Shekalim, Zachor, Parah, and HaChodesh. The last two, Parshat Parah and Parshat

HaChodesh, are always read on back-to-back weeks, while the first two parshiyot can be spaced to accommodate the calendar.

Why did Chazal, when organizing our calendar, insist that Parah and HaChodesh forever be linked?

Parshat HaChodesh took place on...you guessed it, Rosh Chodesh Nissan. Parshat Parah was told to Bnei Yisrael the next day, the second day of Nissan. So why is Parshat

Parah read before Parshat HaChodesh? The Ran (Rabbeinu Nissim), in the third perek of Masechet Megilah (30a) quotes the Yerushalmi, which provides a practical answer to this problem. It all boils down to tumah (spiritual impurity). Parshat Parah is read first to give the people ample time to become tahor (spiritually clean) in time to bring the Korban Pesach. If we are going to read the parshiyot out of order, we should at least keep them close together -- on back-to-back weeks -- to minimize the anachronism.

A more homiletic answer to this quandary is that often people become tamei as a result of laziness, not being careful enough where they walk, what they touch, etc. We see this rings true because even when one sins by accident, he still must bring a korban shogeg.

If an action truly was an accident, one should not have to bring a korban at all. However, there is generally an element of negligence when accidents occur.

The Florida Legislature amended the motor vehicle statutes by eliminating the word (car) “accident” and replacing it with the word “crash” so that people would accept ownership of the incident, and not be able to easily shirk responsibility.

Parshat HaChodesh, which discusses Pesach preparations, is all about diligence and precision in its laws; this is not a time to be lazy.

Chazal linked the two parshiyot together in this order to juxtapose Parshat Parah, which puts us on notice to stop being careless, with Parshat HaChodesh, which reminds us to be diligent.

This is actually a nice lesson for every week of the year.

Chag Kasher V'Sameach.

A TILTED SCALE

Yael Attias ('16)

PARSHAT TAZRIA DEALS WITH THE PUNISHMENT of tzara'at -- a lesion that appeared on the skin of a person who had spoken lashon hara. The text describes how the affected area had to be shown to the kohen who would then prescribe the form of correction needed. This correction involved distancing the transgressor from the community.

Learning about tzara'at and its punishment since I was a little girl, I have always thought of how fortunate I am to not have lived in the times when tzara'at existed. However, after reading an idea given by Rabbi Dovid Green, my thoughts have changed.

Rabbi Green suggests that we will be truly fortunate when tzara'at is once again used as a punishment for lashon hara. How lucky we will be to have a clear indication of a transgression we have committed

and receive clear guidance on how to undo it.

Rabbi Green tells the parable of a man that is brought to heaven after what he thought was a long life of good deeds. The man is shocked to discover that the scale of judgment is heavily loaded on the side of transgressions.

This man cries out, saying he dedicated his whole life to charity and Torah, and it is therefore impossible for the scale to be weighted towards the side of transgressions!

Hashem explains that the scale is loaded with every negative word that he said about another person in his lifetime. If only this man had lived in the times of the Beit Hamikdash, he would have paid the price for lashon hara in the physical world and wouldn't be in this position.

A good way to work on lashon hara is NOT to stop speaking. Rather, we must try to look at the good things and strengths of each person. We are not fortunate to be living in the times of the Beit Hamikdash when Hashem made it known when one had sinned, in this case through tzara'at. We must therefore be even more careful about speaking lashon hara so that after 120 years our scale will be tilted on the side of mitzvot.

THE POWER OF WORDS

Izy Muller ('17)

PARSHAT TAZRIA DESCRIBES THE PROCESS A PERSON MUST UNDERGO after contracting tzara'at, a leprosy-type skin disease.

The man or woman who has contracted tzara'at must visit the kohen, live outside of the camp for a period of seven days, and burn his/her clothing. The question that stems from these laws is, why does

the Torah spend so much time elaborating upon the harsh punishment of this disease?

In Bamidbar perek 12, Miriam and Aharon speak about Moshe behind his back; as a result, Miriam contracts tzara'at. Clearly, the Torah establishes tzara'at as the punishment for lashon hara. The Torah advocates against defamation and slander, which have serious repercussions. Thus, Parshat Tazria is not merely about a skin disease; rather, it conveys an overarching lesson: do not gossip.

Hillel said:

דעלך סני לחברך לא תעביד

“That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow” (Shabbat 31a)

The Rabbis went as far as to say, “When you gossip, you kill three people -- the person gossiping, the person being spoken to, and the person being spoken about” (Arachin 15b).

This lesson has been echoed within many parables, including the famous Jewish parable which states:

A man went to his rabbi and said, “Rabbi, I have spoken poorly about my neighbor. How can I take it back?”

The rabbi responded, “Come back with a pillow full of feathers.” When the man returned with the pillow, the rabbi directed him to tear open the pillow, release the feathers, and return in a week. When he returned, the rabbi said, “Now, pick up the feathers.”

Bewildered, the man claimed it was impossible; the feathers had spent a week floating around. He would never be able to collect every feather.

The same principle is applied throughout Judaism. The power of words is immense, as is the punishment for their abuse. While Parshat Tazria may

appear as a health catalogue, it actually serves as a valuable lesson to help calibrate every person's moral compass.

THE COMPANY YOU KEEP

JORDAN LANDES ('18)

כָּל יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר הִנֵּגַע בּוֹ יִטְמָא טְמֵא הוּא בְּדָד יֵשֵׁב
מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבֵוֹ

“All the days the lesion is upon him, he shall remain unclean. He is unclean; he shall dwell isolated; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.” (Vayikra 13:46)

OUR SAGES EXPLAIN THAT THE PUNISHMENT OF A METZORA, the person who speaks lashon hara, is fitting; since he causes the separation of friends with his gossip, he too should be isolated from others.

According to Rashi, the metzora is quarantined because his affliction is a punishment for evil speech, which causes husbands to be separated from wives and friends from each other. Therefore, it makes sense that Hashem punishes him through isolation from society because Hashem's ultimate purpose in punishment is to awaken the sinner to his wrongdoing. It is no wonder that the person with tzara'at was sent out of the camp to be alone, since he abused his free speech and caused people, through his evil talk, to separate from each other.

The book *Growth through Torah*, by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, gives another reason for the interesting punishment of the metzora. Being alone is very stressful. Everyone needs other people. While some people have a greater need to be around others and some have a lesser need, being in isolation causes much suffering.

Living your life with many people around you is a source of many benefits. But there is always a

price. The people around you are bound to irritate you in some fashion. If you keep in mind that the alternative is being alone, you will view all the displeasures and annoyances as something worth holding on to. Focusing on your need for others will help you to stop evaluating others based on how much they annoy you, and will thereby lessen your gossip.

HOLD YOUR TONGUE

EMMA FRANK ('18)

LASHON HARA IS A VERY SERIOUS SIN AND RESULTS IN THE TRANSGRESSOR being afflicted with tzara'at, a leprosy-like illness. Why is the sin of lashon hara so severe that it must be punished with tzara'at? The Torah states:

וַיִּצְרֵן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפֹּחַ
בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

“And Hashem formed man of dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living soul.” (Bereishit 2:7)

Accordingly, it is the soul that gives a person the power to speak. Because these two are directly connected, great damage is done to the soul when someone sins through speech.

Lashon hara is therefore punished severely and instantaneously. We must protect our souls every day by refraining from speaking negatively about others.

The tongue, of all limbs and organs, moves with the least difficulty and most speed. Consequently, lashon hara is one of the sins committed most frequently. It is for this reason that the mouth is guarded with two gates: the teeth and the lips. A person must think twice before he says something once.



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