

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series

Portion of Tazria-Metzora

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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Dean

1. Dietary Laws, Perceiving the Potential of the Jewish Soul

The Torah states, "**Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aaron, saying to them: Speak to the Children of Israel saying: These are the creatures that you may eat from among the animals that are upon the earth.**" The Midrash states, "G'd allowed the nations of the world to eat the contaminated species, crawling creatures, and rodents, which are considered to be putrid and detestable. In contrast, the Jew is not permitted to eat any of these contaminated species. To what is this analogous? To a doctor who evaluated two patients. One was deathly ill with no chance of recovery. The doctor told his family that he should not be denied anything that he wants to eat. Afterwards, the doctor evaluated the second patient and saw that he had the ability to recover. He then instructed the family that he was only permitted to eat certain foods; however, other foods must be withheld from him to ensure his recovery. After hearing what the doctor prescribed to each of his patients, the doctor was asked, 'Why do you differentiate between the two patients regarding what they are permitted to eat although they have the same illness?' The doctor responded, 'Regarding the patient who is deathly ill, since he will die in any case, there is no reason to deny him anything that he desires. However, the patient, who has relevance to life, must adhere to a strict dietary regiment if he is to live.' Similarly, G'd permitted to the nations of the world to eat anything that they desire. However, since the Jewish people have relevance to eternity, they need to maintain their spiritual purity and sanctity. As it states, '**You should be holy, because I (G'd) am holy...**' Therefore, G'd forbade them from eating the species that would contaminate them. As it states, '**You who cling to Hashem, your G'd, you are all alive today.**'"

The Jew has relevance to eternal life because of his attachment to G'd, Who is the source of all life. In order for the Jew to maintain his relevance and attachment to G'd, he must maintain a sanctified status by separating himself from things that would contaminate and abominate him. Rashi explains that in the verse, "**These are the**

creatures (chaya) that you may eat..." the word "chaya (creature)" is a reference to "chaim (life)." Since, it is by only eating species (Chaya) that are not contaminated, the Jew will have reliance to eternal "live." Because the Jewish people are attached to the Creator they are meant to live. He removed them from spiritual contamination and legislated upon them the mitzvos. In contrast, because the nations of the world do not have relevance to eternity, G'd allows them to indulge in all species that contaminate one's soul.

The Torah states, "**You should be holy, because I (G'd) am holy...**" In order for one to be able to cleave to G'd one must establish a commonality with Him. Therefore, the Jew must sanctify himself by being removed from things that contaminate him.

2. Humility, the Lens to see things for what they are

The Torah states regarding the mitzvah of circumcision, "**On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.**" The Midrash states, "We see that the Torah does not require any special expenditure regarding the performance of the mitzvah of circumcision. However, come and see to what degree the Jewish people endear the mitzvos and demonstrate their love for them! They incur great expenditures to fulfill the mitzvos and rejoice in them. G'd said, 'Because you fulfill the mitzvos with joy, I will add to you an even greater level of joy.' As it states, 'Those who are humble to G'd will receive another level of joy.'"

The Torah states in the portion of Ki Savo (*Tochacha* (curses)), that the Jewish people will be subject to the curses because they did not serve G'd with "**joy and goodness of heart.**" This is addressing the Jewish people who were in fact diligent in their observance of the mitzvos; however, they did not serve G'd with joy. If one serves G'd in a begrudging manner, then it is only a matter of time, that he will cease to perform the mitzvos and stray from the path. Therefore, one must continuously feel a sense of privilege and joy that G'd has chosen him to

fulfill His Torah. How does one maintain such a sense of privilege? The Torah states, **“The ordinances that I (G’d) have commanded you today...”** Rashi explains that the word “today” in the verse connotes that the Jew must regard the mitzvos (throughout the generations) as if G’d had commanded him “today” to fulfill them. They must continuously be experienced as new in one’s eyes. As Rashi cites Chazal, a new proclamation is considered as special and important to the one who hears it, compared to a proclamation of the past in which one loses interest in it. If one regards the mitzvos as something that was given in the past, since they are not regarded as special, one may come to feel that he is being infringed upon and thus perform them begrudgingly.

The Midrash tells us that although the Jewish people were not commanded to rejoice in the mitzvos; however, because they feel a sense of privilege they fulfill them wholeheartedly. Consequently, G’d will bestow upon them even greater joy and blessing. The verse cited by the Midrash states that G’d will add joy to those who are humble. What is the relevance of humility to one’s joy? Evidently, one is an outgrowth of the other. If one’s focus is on his own interests and needs, his priority is himself. Although he may be committed to fulfill the mitzvos and address his obligation as a Jew, because that is not his primary focus, he ultimately will feel that it is an infringement on his life. This individual will not be classified as one who is truly humble. If in fact he was truly humble, he would want to reciprocate to G’d for being his benefactor. To be able to perceive and value doing the Will of G’d as a privilege and being involved in something that is most special, it is determined by one’s degree of humility. As one’s humility increases, it will cause the individual to rejoice to even a greater degree regarding the mitzvos.

Regarding the mitzvah of circumcision, when a father takes his newborn son at the age of eight days and circumcises him by removing the foreskin and does so with joy, it is a demonstration that he appreciates the innate value of the mitzvah. If he did not value the mitzvah, it would be as if he would doing a perfunctory act without any interest or intent. The Midrash tells us that the worldview of circumcision is seen as a barbaric and cruel act. If one is born in an uncircumcised state, why should the child be mutilated? However, if one understands and appreciates the Will of G’d, he will fulfill the mitzvah with joy.

We say every morning in the morning prayers, “We are fortunate- how good is our portion, how pleasant is our lot, and how beautiful is our heritage!” When one is able to internalize this declaration, one truly feels a sense of privilege. However, the only one who can have a true sense of its value, is the one who is humble. Therefore his priority goes beyond himself to do the Will of G’d which is Torah study and the performance of the mitzvos.

3. The Linkage Between Circumcision and Land of Israel

The Torah states regarding the mitzvah of circumcision, **“On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin (*orlaaso*) shall be circumcised.”** The Torah tells us that the mitzvah of circumcision was initially given to Avraham, our Patriarch. The commentators explain that there is a linkage between the covenant of the removal of the foreskin (circumcision) and receiving the Land of Canaan. Being circumcised was a prerequisite to receiving the Land. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that throughout history that the Jews and the Arabs were the only people who were able to remain in the Land because they were circumcised. The Christians who have come to the Land, such as during the Crusades, were only able to remain in the Land for a short period of time because they were not circumcised. This is because the Land cannot tolerate one who is in a uncircumcised state (the Land “spits him out”). However, the Jewish people who have a complete circumcision (*meilah* and *priya*) can remain in the Land on a permanent basis. The Arabs however, since they are only partially circumcised (*meilah* without *priya*) can only remain in the Land until the coming of Moshiach. When the ultimate redemption will come, they too will be removed from the Land.

The Mishna in Tractate Nidarim tells us that if one makes a vow that no one who is uncircumcised can benefit from him, although the Arab is physically circumcised, he cannot benefit from this individual. The Mishna explain that although the Arab is circumcised, the nations of the world are nevertheless referred to as *“orlei leiv”* (those who possess a covering on the heart). The classification of being circumcised or uncircumcised is not only determined by the status of the foreskin, but rather when the inner covering of the heart can be removed, due to the removal of the foreskin, thus rendering the individual with a circumcised heart.

The Gemara in Tractate Kesubos states, “One who lives outside of the Land of Israel, it is as if he has no

G'd." Maharsha in his commentary (based upon Ramban) explains that the world was divided among the seventy root nations of the world. Each location has relevance to that particular nation. Every nation was given an archangel to oversee its existence and function. All sustenance that comes from G'd to every nation is transmitted through the archangel of each nation. The Land of Israel has no archangel associated with it, because G'd Himself directly oversees all of its needs. Thus, all the sustenance and influences relating to the Land of Israel emanate directly from G'd without an intermediary. When the Jew lives outside of the Land of Israel he receives his sustenance through the archangel of that location rather than directly from G'd. It is thus the equivalent to not having a direct relationship with G'd.

The foreskin (orlah) is a representation of spiritual contamination, the evil that exists within man. Chazal tell us that if one wants to enter into the palace of the king, one must remove all contaminated things that are associated with him or else he cannot enter the palace. Therefore, in order for one to be able to remain in the Land, the Holy Land which is the location of G'd's Presence, one must remove the foreskin (orlah) which represents contamination and evil. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains based on the Zohar that Adam was created in a circumcised state without a foreskin. However, after he sinned by eating of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil he became tainted with evil. The foreskin (orlah) developed on him as an expression of the evil that he had integrated into his being. The Jewish people have the ability to remove themselves from that evil (to a degree) by performing the mitzvah of circumcision.

Chazal tell us that Avraham, our Patriarch observed the entire Torah including all of the rabbinic fences that would be legislated in the future. The Brisker Rav asks, "If Avraham, our Patriarch observed the entire Torah before it was given to the Jewish people at Sinai, why did he not circumcise himself before the age of 99? Why did he wait until G'd commanded him to do so?" The Brisker Rav answers based on the Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin, "Greater is the one who is commanded and performs (the mitzvah), than the one who is not commanded and performs (the mitzvah)." Since Avraham knew through his prophetic vision that in the future he would be commanded to circumcise himself by G'd, he waited until that moment to fulfill the mitzvah on a more advanced level, as one who was commanded to do so. Thus, by not circumcising himself until he was commanded to do so, Avraham's circumcision was more complete.

One can explain that Avraham waited to be commanded by G'd to circumcise himself, although he was aware that ultimately there would be such a mitzvah, because he understood that the removal of the foreskin, which is the removal of evil, only effects the inner essence of the person when he is sufficiently advanced. Otherwise, he would be no different than the gentile, who remains as an "*orlei leiv*" even if he were to perform the physical act of circumcision. Therefore, Avraham waited until he sufficiently separated the evil from within himself to be qualified to be circumcised. Thus, the prerequisite of receiving the gift of the Land of Canaan was the covenant which came about through circumcision. Because entering into the Land is the equivalent of entering the palace of the king, he cannot enter into the palace as long as he possess the evil within him from the Tree of Knowledge. This mitzvah is thus performed on the eighth day, which connotes something that transcends the natural order, which is physical existence. As Maharal of Prague explains, the number seven represents the natural order while the number eight represents the supernatural. Thus, the Jew being circumcised on the eighth day signifies the detachment from evil, which is contained within physical existence, to be qualified to be attached to G'd, the Omnipotent Being.

4. Lashon Harah, An Expression of Evil

The Torah states, "...**This shall be the law of the leper (*metzora*) ...**" The Midrash explains, "The meaning of the word '*metzora*' is '*motzi rah*' (one who expresses evil by speaking negatively about another where there is no constructive value)." Thus, when one speaks lashon harah (negative speech) the consequence is leprosy. The early commentators explain that the leprosy (*tzaraas*) this is discussed in the Torah is not the degenerative disease that we know as leprosy, but rather it is a lesion of a particular color that develops on the skin as a result of a spiritual failing. When one develops such a lesion, he must go to the Kohen in order to evaluate if in fact it is *tzaraas*, which contaminates.

The Torah tells us that the Kohen is the only person qualified to pronounce the lesions to be leprous or not. If the Kohen pronounces the person as contaminated, then he is classified as a leper and must be sent out of all the camps of Israel. He must remain there in a isolated state and is not permitted to interact with other individuals. In order for the leper to be reinstated into the camp of Israel, the lesion must heal and only then can the Kohen pronounce him as "pure."

Sforno explains that one aspect of the qualification of the Kohen to pronounce the leper as impure or pure is based on a verse in *Malachi*, “The lips of the Kohen are the keepers of the *daas* (wisdom).” After the Kohen pronounces the individual as *tamei* (contaminated) and he is sent outside of all the camps to remain alone, the Kohen instructs the leper how to introspect and reflect on his behavior, since leprosy only comes about because of a spiritual failing. The Kohen instructs him how to repent in order for his supplications for recovery should be received by G’d. In addition, the Kohen will also pray on his behalf as well. The leper will only be able to recover through repentance and not through any medical treatment, since the cause of his state and condition came about through speaking *lashon hara*.

The Gemara in Tractate *Taanis* tells us that at the end of time, the animals of the forest will put the snake on trial. They will say in an accusatory manner to the snake, “The lion tramples its prey and devours it to satisfy its hunger. The bear kills its prey and takes it back to its den to eat it. Each creature kills and devours its prey with the purpose to satisfy its hunger to maintain its existence; however, you (the snake) bite your victim and slither away without necessarily consuming it. What benefit do you have from victimizing the one who you bite?” The snake responds, “Why should I be more culpable than man who speaks *lashon hara*?” The person who speaks *lashon hara* also victimizes his victim without having any physical benefit. The snake continues by saying, “Why should I be vilified more than the human being? Why is my failing greater than his?” Why is the need to satisfy one’s desire to speak *lashon hara* any less than a need to want to satisfy one’s physical desire?

A human being is a composite of the physical and the spiritual. The body represents the animal. All the animalistic drives of the human emanate from the physicality of his being. The soul (*neshama*) is the spiritual component of the human being. The soul does has no interest in anything unless it has some relevance to spirituality. Therefore, when one fails spiritually and sins, it is attributed to the physicality of the person – not the spirituality. The claim the animals of the forest have against the snake was that its need is not found within the animal makeup. The animal drive within the context of an animal has relevance only to satisfy a physical need – not some other level of satisfaction. Thus, the snake’s need to bite its victim and slither off without having any physical benefit is an anathema. It is something that is intrinsically evil, which is the same evil possessed by the snake at the time of the sin of Adam. We are able to understand the

snake’s response to the animal tribunal to be, “I am no more culpable than the human being who speaks *lashon hara*, which does not emanate from his physicality, because it is something that has no relevance to the animal.”

The Gemara tells us that there is no death without sin. When one transgresses the Torah the punishment manifests itself in a physical consequence. Thus, the individual is subject to physical illness or limitation. Since *lashon hara* does not emanate from something rooted in the animalistic makeup of the individual, its consequence does not manifest in a typically context of physical diminishment. Thus, the lesion is not something that is degenerative, but rather it is only an indicator that there is a serious spiritual deficiency. It is a manifestation of the intrinsic evil that exists within that individual.

Chofetz Chaim writes in his work, *Chofetz Chaim*, that over time if one engages in evil speech, one can be in violation of seventeen negative commandments and fourteen positive commandments. One of the negative commandments that one speaks *lashon harah* is “the desecration of G’d’s Name (*chilul Hashem*).” If one’s sin in an area that caused by his animalistic makeup, such as eating forbidden foods, it is understandable because it has relevance to his physical essence. However, since *lashon harah* has no physical benefit, it is not attributed to the animalistic drive. It is therefore a desecration of G’d’s Name.

5. G’d Providing Opportunity

The Torah states, “...**When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male...If she gives birth to a female...**” The Midrash states, “If the woman had ovulated by the time of cohabitation, the child conceived will be a male. However if she had not yet ovulated at the time of cohabitation, the child will be a female. Reb Chiya Bar Aba says, ‘From this we see that the (conception of) male (child) is dependant on the female and the (conception of a) female (child) is dependant on the male.’... As it states, Avraham was informed ‘**Milka (female) had given birth to sons to Nochor, your brother...**’ We see also from the verse, ‘**Bisuel (Male) had fathered Rivka.**’ Thus, the female identifies with the conception of a male and the male is identified with the conception of the female.” Why did G’d create the world in this manner – that the conception of the male is

determined by the woman and the conception of the female is determined by the man?

Ksav Sofer (the son of the Chasam Sofer) explains that since the female is not obligated in many of the mitzvos that the man is obligated to perform, she is denied the spiritual benefit of those mitzvos from which she is exempt. For example, while a man is obligated in the study of Torah, which in relationship to other mitzvos is the ultimate, a woman is not. G'd created existence in a way to allow each person to be able to be a spiritual beneficiary of all the mitzvos. Thus, by allowing the female to be the cause of the conception of the male, she is in essence the one responsible from bringing him into existence. Therefore, all the spiritual accomplishments that the son will achieve in his lifetime will accrue to the mother who initially conceived him. It is in this manner that the woman can reap the merit and spiritual benefits of the mitzvos that do not pertain to her. Similarly, there are many mitzvos that pertain only to the woman, such as the laws of family purity (counting days towards purity, emersion in a mikvah, etc.), to which the male has no relevance. Therefore, G'd allowed the male to be the cause of the conception of the female in order for him to be a beneficiary of his daughter's spiritual accomplishments.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin states, "The son brings merit to the father but the father does not bring merit to the son." Meaning, if the father was evil and he had a righteous son, he would be a beneficiary of the spiritual accomplishments of his son. However, if a righteous father were to have an evil son, the son's spiritual record will not be enhanced by the spiritual accomplishments of the father. Although the evil son may be presented with special spiritual opportunities in his lifetime, because he is the son of a righteous individual; the righteousness of his father will not be attributed to him. This is because the father is the cause of the son's existence, which is not the case regarding the son versus the father.

Based on the principle that a son brings merit to the father, the Mishna in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that if one comes upon the lost object of his father and the lost object of a third party, returning the object to the father takes precedence over the other. Because, "His father had brought him into existence." The Mishna continues - if one finds the lost object of his father and the lost object of his rebbe (spiritual mentor), returning the object of his mentor takes precedence, because "His father brought him into the physical world; however, his rebbe gave him

relevance to the world to come ..." Eternal existence has greater value than the limited existence in this world. Therefore, the rebbe takes precedence over the father.

Ramah writes in his glosses on the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) that if one provides for the Jewish education of another, he is considered to be the equivalent of his mentor (*rabo muvak*), although he never engaged in the study of Torah with the recipient of his support. This is because without the benefactor's financial support, the student would have never been able to develop as a Torah Jew. He is thus directly responsible for the spiritual development of the student. Consequently, all the spiritual accomplishments of the student accrue to the benefactor.

Chofetz Chaim writes that if one provides the means for an individual or a family to become more observant and they actually advance spiritually, the initial supporter will reap all the merit that will be generated by the family until the end of existence. This is because the benefactor was the catalyst that allowed the spiritual advancement to come about.

G'd provided the Jewish people with a setting and mechanism that allows them to reap maximum benefit from mitzvah performance. Regardless of how removed one may be from the actualization of the performance of the Torah Itself, the benefactor who supports it will be the beneficiary of all that came about as a result of his support. Similarly, G'd created the male and the female in a way that each of them will be the beneficiary of the other gender's mitzvah performance.