

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

**Portion of Tazria**

April 7, 2016

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

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**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

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Tazria

New York  
April 7, 2016

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

## 1. Drawing G'd into this Existence

The Torah tells us that on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan the Divine Presence entered into the Mishkan. At that moment, Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron brought forth fire pans with incense, which was considered sinful. The Torah states, **“A fire came forth from G'd and consumed them, and they died before Hashem...”** One opinion, regarding the death of Nadav and Avihu explains that since the Torah juxtaposes their death with the prohibition for a Kohen (Priest) to officiate after drinking wine or an intoxicating beverage, it is indicated that they were struck down by G'd because they officiated in an intoxicated state.

The Torah states after the death of Nadav and Avihu, **“G'd said to Aaron, ‘Do not drink intoxicating wine, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Tent of the Meeting, that you not die...and to teach (I'horos) the Children of Israel all the decrees that G'd had spoken to them through Moshe.’”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, that from here we learn that one is not permitted to render a halachic ruling while intoxicated. Just as the Kohen is not permitted to officiate after drinking 2.9 oz.- small measure (*revi'is*) of any intoxicating beverage, one is not permitted to render a halachic ruling. If this is so, one would think that perhaps if one were to render a halachic ruling in an intoxicated state he would be liable for spiritual excision, as the Kohen would be. However, the Torah limits this liability to the Kohen and not to the Torah scholar who renders a halachic ruling. It is understandable that if a Kohen is in an intoxicated state that he will be liable for spiritual excision because he has entered in to the Sanctuary and officiated before G'd in a state of inappropriateness; however, why would there be a consideration that one who renders a halachic ruling in such as state should be liable to this degree? Although the Torah scholar's thinking may be impaired because of the small amount of wine that he drank, why there be a liability of spiritual excision for rendering a ruling?

The Gemara in Tractate Yevamos tells us, that between the festival of Passover and Shavuos, 24,000 students of Rebbe Akiva passed away in a plague. They perished over a 33-day period. The Gemara explains that the reason the students of Rebbe Akiva passed away in such a short period of time was that “They did not conduct

themselves with proper respect towards one another.” Rav Aaron Kotler z'tl explains that the students of Rebbe Akiva were the sages who would be responsible for the transmission of Torah to the future generations. They had the responsibility of communicating the Torah in its most accurate and authentic form – as it was given at Sinai. However, because they did not have sufficient sensitivity to evaluate the nuances between their various levels of Torah, to revere and esteem one another, they were not qualified for this quintessential task. Since they did not have the sensitivity to recognize the subtleties between themselves, it was an indication that they did not have the necessary level of discernment to transmit Torah with the accuracy that was necessary. Their passing was not related to their level of Torah knowledge, rather it was because they did not qualify to be the transmitters of the Torah. Had they not died, the Torah that they would have communicated would have been not been accurate and thus not G'd's Word. Therefore, the students needed to pass away in order to preserve the purity, eternity, and authenticity of Torah.

Similarly, a Torah scholar who is in a position to give a halachic ruling is responsible for the proper transmission of Torah and its edicts. However, if through his own action of drinking wine, his judgment becomes even slightly impaired it is considered to be negligent to an extreme degree. Although when one renders a ruling after drinking an intoxicating beverage, it is not considered the actual transmission of Torah, nevertheless, the information being transmitted is regarded to be the word of G'd, which it is not. Thus, one would think that the liability for this should be spiritual excision. Therefore the Torah states the law in an exclusionary manner to exclude the Torah scholar from spiritual excision.

Regarding the Kohen, his liability stems not from the fact that his function is impaired, as with the Torah scholar, but rather it stems from officiating before G'd and officiating in an inappropriate and disrespectful state. If this is so, what is the commonality between the Kohen and the Torah scholar's inappropriateness of this state?

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos states, “After the destruction of the Temple, G'd only has in His world the four cubits of Halacha (definitive law).” After the destruction of the Temple, the Divine Presence is located where definitive law is being studied and elucidated. The Ponevitch Rav explains the Gemara to mean, that during

the time of the Temple, the Divine Presence was located not only in the Holy of Holies of the Temple but also within the location in which Halacha was being studied. However, after the destruction of the Temple, all that G'd has is the four cubits of Halacha. G'd associates Himself with the location in which definitive law is studied and rendered. If so, one could say that the location in which the Torah scholar is engaged in rendering a halachic ruling is in actuality the location of the Divine Presence. If this is so, one could think that the liability of the Torah scholar should be spiritual excision as the Kohen who officiates in the sanctuary. Therefore the Torah must state that the Kohen is the one with this level of liability and not the Torah scholar when he renders an halachic ruling.

## 2. The Human Being, a Composite of the Physical and the Spiritual

Regarding the laws of leprosy, when various lesions appear on one's body, it is an indication of leprosy (*tzaraas*). The intensity of the whiteness of the lesion will determine if the lesion is leprosy or not. The pronouncement of the lesion being leprosy is made only by the Kohen, thus causing the individual to be a "leper." He will thus need to leave all of the camps of Israel. The commentators explain that the leprosy that 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 specific spiritual failing. When one develops such a lesion, he must go to the Kohen to evaluate if in fact it is *tzaraas*. The Kohen is the only individual qualified to pronounce the lesions to be leprosy and to reinstate him.

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 religion." After the Kohen pronounces the individual as 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 and the community will also pray on his behalf as well. The cause of the leprosy is due to one speaking *lashon hara* (negative speech about another individual). The leper will only be able to recover through repentance and not through any medical treatment.

The leper does not experience any physical pain or degeneration as a result of his leprosy. His condition is purely to make him aware of his spiritual failing and his need to repent. Chazal tell us that the reason the leper must be isolated outside of the camps is because, just as his negative speech separated between man and his fellow, so too must he be separated from his fellow – "measure for measure."

The Gemara tells us that there is no death without sin. All physical ailments and suffering are manifestations of one's transgression of the Torah. Thus, the individual is subject to physical illness or limitation. The Gemara in Tractate *Berachos* also states that by experiencing suffering one is cleansed from sin. If punishment manifests itself through physical degeneration or suffering, which is always the consequence of sin, why when one speaks *lashon hara* does it not manifest itself in this physical manner? Why is the result of speaking *lashon hara* expressed only as a lesion of a certain color which is only a tag that indicates the spiritual failing?

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 mauls and 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 of the tongue (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?"

A human being is a composite of the physical and the spiritual. The physicality of the person, which is the body, represents the animal. All the animalistic drives and desires of the human being emanate from the physicality of his being. The soul is the spiritual component of the human being. The soul has no relevance or inclination to anything unless it has some relevance to spirituality. Therefore, when one fails spiritually and sins, it is

attributed to one succumbing to the physicality of his being and unrelated to his spirituality. The claim the animals of the forest have against the snake, was that its need to victimize the one who he bites, is not found within the animal makeup. The inclination that is attributed to the animal has relevance only to satisfy a physical need – not something outside of that context. 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 corrupt and evil.

Since *lashon hara* does not emanate from something that is rooted in the animalistic makeup of the human being, its consequence does not manifest in physical diminishment. Thus, the lesion is not something that is degenerative, but rather it is only a tag (indicator) of the spiritual deficiency that came about due to *lashon hara*. It is a manifestation of something that is rooted in something that is truly evil that exists within that individual.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah states, “**Rava says, “There was no one who was more adept in speaking *lashon hara* (evil speech) than Haman the evil one.**” Haman was the expert in evil speech. Haman was an Amalekite, who is a personification of evil. The Torah states, “**G'd said, ‘My Throne cannot be complete until Amalek is obliterated from under the heaven.’**” Chazal depict the Amalekites when they attacked the Jewish people after the splitting of the Sea as “the fool who jumped into the scalding bath. Although he is scalded by the hot water, he nevertheless cools the bath for others.” Despite the fact that the world stood in awe of the Jewish people after G'd split the Sea on their behalf, Amalek being unfazed, attacked them. Their motivation was purely evil and not rooted in their physicality.

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 who speaks *lashon hara* is “the desecration of G'd's Name (*chilul Hashem*).” Since this sin is not due to succumbing to one's physical desire but rather it is rooted in behaving contrary to G'd's Will purely because the individual wants to do so.

### ***3. The Effect of Being Separated from the Jewish People***

The Torah tells us that when the Kohen rules that the lesion found on one's body is in fact leprosy, the

individual is pronounced to be a leper and he is sent outside of all the camps of Israel to be sequestered in a state of solitude. In his secluded location, he has time to reflect and introspect upon his behavior, which caused his contaminated state. Chazal tell us that one becomes a leper if he speaks *lashon hara* (negative speech about another), or if he is overwhelmingly envious, miserly, or haughty.

The Gemara in Tractate Nedarim tells us that a leper is the equivalent of one who is dead. The intensity of the spiritual contamination that is generated by leper is similar to that of a corpse. Just as if one is in the same room as a Jewish corpse, one will become contaminated, so too if one is in the same room as a leper one will become contaminated. Just as the Kohen is the only one qualified to pronounce the lesion as leprosy, he is the only one qualified to pronounce the leper as pure. Sforno cites a verse from *Malachi*, “The lips of the Kohen are the keepers of the religion.” It is because of this that the Kohen must instruct the leper how to introspect and repent sufficiently in order to recover from his contaminated state. In addition to introspection and repentance, the Kohen instructs the leper to pray for himself to recover from his state of leprosy which came about because of his spiritual failing. The Kohen also prays on behalf of the leper to recover.

There is a situation in which an individual develops a lesion and it is questionable if it is leprosy or not. The Kohen may decide to sequester him for a week in order to further assess the nature of the lesion. After the week passes and the lesion remains undetermined, the Kohen may decide to sequester the individual for another week. After the second week, if the lesion is determined to not be leprosy, the individual will be allowed to return to the camp of Israel; however, he must first immerse himself and his clothing in a ritual bath (*mikvah*) in order to purify himself. If the lesion was determined to not be leprosy, why should he be considered contaminated and need to be immersed in a *mikvah* in order to return to the camp of Israel?

During the time the individual is quarantined and sequestered outside of the camps of Israel, he is not permitted to have any contact with anyone. He must remain there for a period of time determined by the Kohen, until he is considered to have recovered. We see from this, that if a Jew is separated and cut-off from the Jewish people, he is considered to be the equivalent of a non-functioning person. He is the equivalent of one who has died. A Jew is only considered to be vibrant and alive if he is connected to the Jewish people. Being in an

halachically separated state, is the equivalent of spiritual excision (which is decreed by G'd). This is the reason the individual who was sequestered although his lesion was later determined to be non-leprous, must immerse himself in the mikvah because of the contamination that came upon him from separated from the Jewish people.

Sforno explains, "Leprosy comes upon a person for the sake of punishment. As the Gemara in Tractate Berachos states, 'Leprosy is the altar of atonement...' It is a time when one must remain sequestered and isolated to be aroused to introspect and repent... When one has alone without any distractions, he will introspect." If the individual after he is sequestered repents sufficiently, then his lesion will be pronounced as pure by the Kohen. If however he does not repent, then must remain separated from the Jewish people outside of all the camps until he comes to the realization that he must introspect and repent sufficiently.

The Gemara in Tractate Chulin tells us that if one stubs his finger or toe, it is an indication that at that moment it was decreed from heaven that he needed to suffer for a spiritual failing. This is similar to the one who develops a lesion on his skin as an indication that he has failed spiritually. If this is so, why does one not need to introspect and repent after stubbing his toe, as the one who becomes a leper? Seemingly, both punishments emanate from one's spiritual failing. If so, why does the one who stubs his toe, as decreed by heaven, not become contaminated? Evidently, the two situations are not similar. The leper needs to be sent out of all the camps and becomes contaminated, which is an indication of the gravity of his sin. Whereas, the one who stubs his toe as a punishment from heaven, has not sinned to the same degree.

#### ***4. 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.

## 5. *The Impediment to Spirituality*

The Torah states, "**Moshe said, 'This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you (the Divine Presence will Descend).'**" The verse does not explain to what Moshe is referring when he said, "**This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do....**" Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh writes, "Rashi explains that this is referring to Aaron coming close by bringing his offering. However, it seems to me that Moshe is referring to what was stated in the previous verse. The Torah states, '**...the entire assembly approached and stood before Hashem.**' Why does the verse specify regarding the standing of the assembly, that they '**stood before Hashem?**' The verse could have stated they '**stood before the Tent of the Meeting.**' ...The Torah is telling us, the Jewish people needed to prepare themselves to stand before G'd Himself to be worthy of the Divine Presence." One is only worthy of a relationship with G'd if one truly understands, esteems, and reveres Him. If one does not have the proper level of humility and negation, then G'd will not have a relationship with him.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues, "One who understands and appreciates that he is standing before G'd, will come to understand the ultimate objective of existence. As King David writes, 'I have set before Me G'd always...' One who has a sense that he is in the presence of G'd will not deviate from the Torah. If one truly has reverence because he feels that he is in the Presence of G'd, there will be nothing that will separate him from G'd...This to what Moshe was referring. One must continuously have a sense of the Presence of G'd. After I have written this, another interpretation comes to mind from the words of Chazal. The verse states, '**This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you...**' is referring to circumcision. As it states in the book of Yehoshuah. If the Jewish people were all circumcised during the time of Yehoshuah, to what is it referring? It is referring to the covering that is on the heart of man. The covering of the heart (*orlas haLeiv*) is what separates one from G'd, because it distances one from the fear and reverence of Him. Once that covering is removed, one will be able to have a sufficient level of reverence for G'd and only then will His Glory come to dwell amongst them." Thus, in order to be worthy of an intimate relationship with G'd, one must remove all coverings that exists on one's heart, such as one's sense of self and ego.

Maharal of Prague explains that humility is a prerequisite to having a relationship with G'd. He explains it with an allegory: If one has a flask made of leather, the thinner the leather the greater the capacity the flask has to contain liquid. If the leather is thick, it will have a reduced capacity to contain liquid. Similarly, the more one has a sense of himself and is consumed with his personal material needs, his capacity to have a relationship with G'd is diminished and limited. This is the lesson that Moshe was teaching to the Jewish people, that in order to have a relationship with G'd on a special level, they need to negate themselves and feel that they are standing in His Presence continuously. It is only then will they merit to have a special relationship with Him.