

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת תזריע-מצורע

וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו

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

Why does the commandment of bris milah follow the posuk that discusses the impurity of a new mother? The Midrash says that this teaches that one who guards the laws of niddah will be rewarded with male children. R' Moshe Sternbuch, in his sefer Taam Vadaas, comments that the Midrash does not say that the reward is for keeping the laws of niddah, but for guarding the laws. This includes ensuring that others follow these laws as well. This can be done through educating or advising others in this very important component of the Jewish home. Many people who keep Torah and mitzvos are not thoroughly educated in all the laws of niddah. This is something that needs strengthening.

Rabbi Friedman suggests that "guarding" also refers to enacting safeguards around the mitzvah. Chazal established additional restrictions to prevent us from transgressing the Biblical commandment of niddah. It is important to know these safeguards well and understand their importance so that we can keep the mitzvah properly. When one takes this to heart and accepts to fulfill this mitzvah properly, Hashem will reward that person appropriately.

אדם כי יהיה בעור בשרו שאת או ספחת או בהרת והיה בעור בשרו לנגע צרעת והוא אל אהרן הכהן או אל אחד מבניו הכהנים

“If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a s'eis or a sapachas or a baheres, and it will become a tzaraas affliction on the skin of his flesh; he shall be brought to Aharon the Priest, or to one of his sons the priests” (13:2)

Chazal tell us that tzaraas comes as a punishment for seven sins, the most prominent of which is loshon hara. The Midrash tells the story of a peddler who was going around announcing, “Who wants life?” R' Yanai went over to the man and expressed some interest. The peddler told R' Yanai that what he had was not for a great talmid chacham. R' Yanai insisted so the peddler pulled out a Tehillim and read him the verse: “Who is the man who desires life?...Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking falsehood.” R' Yanai exclaimed that he had never been able to satisfactorily explain this posuk until now. What did he not understand about this? The answer given by the Kochav MiYaakov is that he thought not speaking loshon hara guaranteed a good life in olam haba, but not necessarily in this world. Now he understood that avoiding gossip leads to a pleasant life in this world as well. Many times people get stressed out and cause great pain through their speech. If one is careful, he will spare himself much hardship. The Ksav Sofer says that Rabbi Yanai learned that it is not enough for one to watch his own mouth but to tell others to do the same and be careful as well. This is why the posuk continues: “Avoid evil and do good.” It is not only enough to avoid evil but one must make sure to also do good.

The Ketzos HaChoshen writes that there are many people who do not live for today. They are constantly looking forward to some important event in the future. This is not the proper way to live. Every single day has a potential to be used for certain accomplishments. No day serves only as a stepping stone to the next. One who "desires life" is also one who "loves days." Each and every day is special and is to be cherished. There is always work to be done. It is not just another day in the countdown to some special day.

A similar message is conveyed with regard to Avraham Avinu. Why does the Torah repeat

itself and say that "Avraham was old, he came with days?" Isn't old the same as coming with days? The Alshich explains that every day in the life of Avraham Avinu was full of meaning and was lived to its fullest. Not only did Avraham live a long life in years, but he also was coming with days and each day had been meaningful and lived with a purpose. The Vilna Gaon quotes a Chazal that says that some people merit old age but their days are nothing because each day was not meaningful, while some have meaningful days without old age. Avraham merited to have both. He was an old man whose every day had been lived with meaning and purpose. We should also strive to make each day of our lives meaningful and be sure to accomplish something every day.

This is a central theme of Sefiras HaOmer. We count "Today is 15 days of the Omer" rather than saying "Today is 35 days until Kabalas HaTorah" because the Omer is not just a seven-week waiting period. It is seven weeks to improve ourselves, seven weeks of preparation for Shavuot, the day on which we accept the Torah anew every year. Today is another day in the Omer, another day to climb closer to the pinnacle of Shavuot. Kabalas HaTorah does not happen on its own. We must use each day of the Omer to attain it.

כל ימי אשר הנגע בו יטמא טמא הוא בדד ישב מחוץ למחנה מושבו
“All the days that the affliction is upon him he shall remain contaminated; he is contaminated, he shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling place shall be outside the camp” (13:46)

The Midrash says that the word "metzora" is an acronym for "motzi ra", slandering. The Chochmas Hamitzpon writes that "motzi ra" literally means "brings out bad." A metzora brings out bad because he focuses on the negative in other people. He talks about the flaws of those around him rather than the positive things that they have done. Some people have a double standard. They focus on their own good deeds and look at themselves in a positive light while they scrutinize others and point out all their flaws. A person should act in the exact opposite way. One should always judge others favorably but should never view himself as righteous because there is always room for self-improvement. The metzora is punished through forced seclusion because when he spent time around other people, all he saw was their bad deeds. He needs to be separated from people because he cannot properly deal with that situation. He needs time alone, away from the circumstances of his inappropriate behavior, so that he can reflect on the fact that he has difficulty being among society. This time of reflection will allow him to correct his wrongdoing and be rehabilitated so that he can return to society committing to acting kindly toward others.

ואם דל הוא ואין ידו משגת ולקח כבש אחד אשם לתנופה לכפר עליו ועשרון סלת אחד בלול בשמן למנחה ולג שמן
“If he is poor and his means are not sufficient, then he shall take one male lamb as a guilt-offering for a wave-service to provide atonement for him; and one tenth-ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a meal-offering, and a measure of oil” (14:21)

The Chofetz Chaim uses the different sacrifices prescribed for a poor man and a rich man as a lesson regarding the expectations that Hashem has from people with different abilities. Just as the rich metzora cannot fulfill his obligation with the poor metzora's sacrifice, people who are rich with abilities cannot look at their peers with lesser abilities and comfort themselves that they are better than the others. Although they may think that they are better, this is not necessarily so because they may not be living up to their capabilities. More is expected of a person with more talents. Every individual is held to their own standard. Comparing oneself to others serves no purpose. The bottom line is that a person should strive to be all that he can be. That is what

Hashem expects of him and nothing less.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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