

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)

Chazal derive from this posuk that a milah takes place on the eighth day even when that day is Shabbos. Although causing a wound is one of the forbidden activities on Shabbos, the Torah says that the milah takes place “on the eighth day” and that it supersedes the laws of Shabbos.

The Or Hachaim asks: Why is this detail regarding the mitzvah of milah taught at this point rather than when the mitzvah was originally given to Avraham Avinu? One answer that he gives is that Avraham did not have an obligation to keep Shabbos. Once the Jewish people were commanded to keep Shabbos, it became necessary to teach that the mitzvah of milah overrides Shabbos.

אדם כי יהיה בעור בשרו שאת או ספחת או בהרת והיה בעור בשרו לנגע צרעת
והובא 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)

Why are the laws of tzaraas not introduced with the mandate to “speak to the Bnei Yisrael saying,” just like every other section of the Torah. The Midrash Tanchuma says that this is because Hashem does not want to cause pain to anybody. Tzaraas is not something that must happen, but if a person deserves punishment then it becomes necessary. Telling Moshe and Aharon to relay this command would indicate that it is something that we want to happen and that must happen. But in truth, it is something that we would prefer to avoid. Therefore the Torah introduces these laws by saying that “if a person will have” tzaraas, then these are the guidelines that must be followed.

This week's parshiyos teach the laws of different types of tzaraas. Chazal tell us that Hashem did not immediately punish a person with tzaraas on his body, but first put tzaraas on his house as a warning. If the person did not heed the divine message, then tzaraas would be found on his clothing. If the person still persisted in his evil ways, only then would Hashem send tzaraas on his body. However, the Torah does not go through the laws in this sequence, but actually Torah introduces them in the reverse order. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the ways of the Torah are pleasant and that the Torah does not want to portray a series of progressively harsher punishments. Instead it starts with the harshest punishment and then segues to lighter punishments. The Torah does not wish to be affiliated with punishment and even when it must, it presents it in a nicer way.

נגע צרעת כי תהיה באדם והובא אל הכהן

“If a *tzaraas* affliction will be in a person, he shall be brought to the priest” (13:9)

Chazal teach that a kohen cannot render a decision about his own tzaraas or that of a close relative. Rabbi Friedman suggests that there is an important lesson to be learned from this. People can recognize deficiencies in others very quickly but at the same time they neglect to notice shortcomings in themselves or those close to them. In order to really get a picture of his deficiencies, a person needs to get the advice and input of someone else, just as a kohen needed another kohen in order to determine the nature of his tzaraas. It is important for each person to have a true friend who can tell him where he needs to work on himself and to correct him when he makes mistakes.

והבגד כי יהיה בו נגע צרעת בבגד צמר או בבגד פשתים

“If there shall be a *tzaraas* affliction in a garment, in a woolen garment or a linen garment” (13:47)

Ramban says that tzaraas on clothing or houses is not a natural phenomenon. Only when the Jewish people are close to Hashem in the first place does a sin affect them to the degree that it manifests itself on their bodies as a clear sign of the deterioration in their relationship with Him.

That is why it only occurs in Eretz Yisrael and only after the Jews were settled in the land after conquering it, once they had the time to become close to Hashem and establish a relationship with Him. That is also why tzaraas on clothing only applies to white garments. Tzaraas on colored garments could be attributed to a natural chemical reaction from the dyes rather than a miracle from Hashem. Tzaraas shows that Hashem is removing some of the closeness to the individual because of the sins that he committed.

R' Michel Berenbaum elaborates on this point in his sefer, Sichos Mussar, that even though we don't have these types of tzaraas today, Hashem has other methods of showing us that He is distanced from us. If a person has suffering or difficult times, it is a heavenly message to examine his ways. The point of tzaraas was to send a strong message to a person. Hashem has also programmed other events into the nature of the world that will help arouse a person and that will send a message to people. For example, the Gemara in Berachos 59 says that thunder was created in order to straighten out the crookedness in a person's heart, i.e. to frighten and humble a person and to enable him to mend his ways and do the right thing. It is important for a person to recognize these signs when they come his way and to follow up on them rather than dismiss them as unimportant.

*Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
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