

accordance with his ability.

The sin that catalyzes a guilt-offering is different. *Negaim*, skin afflictions, are Heaven-sent to punish a person for specific sinful behavior – all of which are the result of *gasus ha'ruach*, vile, contemptuous vulgarity. A *gas ruach*, vulgar person, who arrogates over others, whose envy impels him to slander, whose self-absorbed nature leads him to look down upon others, is a contemptible person. If he has been blessed with wealth, he, at least, has something about which to arrogate. What does the wretched, poverty-stricken fellow have to arrogate about? Such a person who has descended into the depths of vulgarity is truly contemptuous. Let him pay for his *korban*. If he wants to “act” wealthy – let him pay.

כונע נראה לי בבית

Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house. (14:35)

Toras Kohanim comments: *Li v'lo l'ori*, “To me – and not to my light.” This teaches that in a dark house, one does not open the windows (to allow sunlight to penetrate) in order to see the affliction (to determine its status of purity). *Damesek Eliezer* suggests that the approach taken by the Torah with regard to the sins committed by man should serve as a paradigm for us in our approach towards the sins of our fellow man. In other words, the Torah is adopting a compassionate and understanding approach to the failings of our fellow man. As we are not permitted to use artificial light (that is not already in the room) to judge an affliction, so, too, should we not reveal the sins of he who has erred in secret.

Obviously, this man has committed a sin, but, at least, he demonstrates shame. He does not want to publicize his weakness, which indicates that his sin is not an act of rebellion – but an act of character deficiency, a predilection toward the inappropriate. Rather than call him a sinner who has neither fear nor shame, he is a weak, troubled (possibly sick) person. By rebuking him in private, we create a favorable climate for his return through *teshuvah*, repentance. As long as his sin is not publicized, he is very much like the affliction in a dark house. Once the shades are raised, we can no longer judge the affliction. Likewise, once his sin receives headlines, the chances for *teshuvah* have been impugned and not likely to occur.

Second, we derive from here that, as long as one is (so to speak) darkened, he has not made it to the public eye; he is not noticed, and people do not talk about him. When the shades are elevated, when he (due to increased wealth or spending) grabs the public's attention or becomes the subject of public adulation and acclaim, the artificial lighting has been “turned on,” and people tend to see the imperfections that are otherwise overlooked. In other words, it is best to maintain a low profile if one has something to hide. Even if he has nothing to hide, by placing himself under the light of publicity, someone will “discover

something” about him – even if it is prefabricated, it will still be damaging. So, is it worth it?

Va'ani Tefillah

סלח לנו אבינו כי חטאנו – Forgive us, our Father, for we have erred (and sinned).
מחל לנו מלכנו כי פשענו – Pardon us, our King, for we have sinned (willfully).

Two forms of forgiveness: *slichah* and *mechilah*; two forms of sin: *cheit* and *pesha*; two types of relationship with the Almighty: *Avinu* and *Malkeinu*.

In his *Yaarus Devash*, *Horav Yehonasan Eibeshutz, zl*, explains that it all begins with our loving Father. When we act appropriately, our relationship is that of a father to son. As soon as we begin to veer from the path of observance, our relationship wanes and begins to deteriorate. In the beginning, the sins are *chataim*, errors, which nonetheless taint the relationship. *Slichah* is a relatively light form of forgiveness. Thus, we ask that Hashem, our Heavenly Father, overlook and forgive our erroneous behavior. A son, however, because he is close to his father, must immediately mend his ways and return to the path from which he veered. If he continues in his sin, it is no longer an error; it is willful rebellion. Under such circumstances, one can hardly ask Hashem, his Father, to overlook his breach in the relationship. He must now turn to Hashem as the Melech, King, and, with a greater and more forceful plea, petition Hashem's pardon. It is interesting how we recite this three times daily, yet fail to realize the connotation of our words.

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ביילע בת אליעזר ע"ה

By her husband, Walter Frank, and her
children and grandchildren,
Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family

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Parashas Tazria-Metzora

תשע"ז

פרשת תזריע מצורע

Tazria

וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו
On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be
circumcised. (12:3)

While every *mitzvah* in the Torah is an obligation to observe, *mitzvas Milah*, the commandment concerning circumcision, seems to be a mainstay – a *mitzvah* for which Jews throughout the millennia have sacrificed themselves. What is it about this *mitzvah* that impacts our lives to such an extent? The first time that this *mitzvah* is mentioned in the Torah is when Hashem commanded Avraham *Avinu* to circumcise himself. In his commentary to *Parashas Emor*, the *Ramban* teaches that with the execution of *Bris Milah* on his body, Avraham was transformed from a *ben Noach*, Noachide, to a *ben Yisrael*, Jew. Despite Avraham's belief in the Creator and his observance of His commandments, Avraham did not achieve this milestone until he was circumcised. Once Avraham committed his body and soul to Hashem, the Almighty changed his name to Avraham, and Judaism was born. In a way, Hashem was recreating Avraham, since, until then, he had been a *ben Noach*. There was Adam *HaRishon*, Primordial/first man, and now there was the first Jew – Avraham *Avinu*. This occurred as a result of *Bris Milah*.

Thousands of times this transformation has taken place: an individual far-removed from Jewish observance is willing to do anything to have a *Bris Milah* performed on his infant son. When a Jew rejects *Milah*, as some of the most alienated Jews have done, they are fighting their spiritual DNA, since *Milah* and Judaism are inextricably bound up together. I guess there is a difference between being assimilated, an individual who simply does not know, and being alienated, an individual who refuses to know, who outright rejects the Jewish label, who views his heritage as a primitive aberration. We can only pray that all of his machinations will one day give way to an illumination through which he will see his utter foolishness. One does not fight Hashem, and, if he does, he certainly does not win.

Eliyahu *HaNavi* attends every *Bris Milah*. Actually, Eliyahu attends two Jewish services – *Bris Milah* and the *Pesach Seder*. These are both transformational experiences: one, in which a young infant enters into the covenant of Judaism; and the other, which celebrates and relives our entrance into nationhood by way of our being liberated from the Egyptian bondage. Indeed, these two practices are almost universally maintained by Jews of all stripes. Eliyahu *HaNavi* is the harbinger of peace. His presence at these two

celebrations indicates the harmony engendered between man and G-d, and between man and his fellow man. Both of these events represent sacrifice. Eliyahu/Pinchas was prepared to sacrifice his life to preserve Hashem's honor. This is why he is the harbinger of true peace. Peace founded on religious compromise is not peace; it is an incursion against Hashem.

Certainly, no dearth of stories exists which underscore the inexorable bond the Jewish People have with *Bris Milah*. The following vignette even includes Eliyahu *HaNavi*. An assimilated Jewess (I guess her husband was beyond assimilation) called a *mohel*, ritual circumciser, and asked him to come to her house to perform a circumcision on her son. When he appeared at the house, he seemed obviously surprised that nothing “Jewish” was to be found in the house. Noticing his incredulity, the woman said, “Please ignore the lack of Jewish symbolism in our home. Neither my husband nor I have any relationship whatsoever with Judaism. We decided to give our son a *Bris* because we do not want him to feel different when he grows up.” The woman added that she was in a big rush, and, since the *Bris* is a minor procedure, she was leaving him in the care of her nanny – who would arrive in approximately one half hour. The two-month old baby was in the midst of his morning nap, so the *mohel* would have to wait a little. Meanwhile, the mother left. The nanny had yet to arrive.

A *Bris Milah* in a solitary house is a bit strange. This was a large city – not a small town with a few Jewish families. Yet, the *Bris* was performed in the company of the *mohel* and the baby; no one else showed up. Whoever heard of such a “celebration”? An empty home; parents who apparently did not care, but what can one do? The mother informed the *mohel* before she left that her infant son's name was Yuval, which the *mohel* affirmed following the *Bris*. The *mohel* served as *sandek*, holding the infant, and as *mohel*; he also held the baby when he gave him his name. It should have been a happy occasion, but it was not. The *mohel* had never experienced such a sad *Bris*.

The nanny had thus far not come. The infant was hungry and he began to cry. The *mohel* went into the kitchen and could not find anything edible for an infant. He attempted to soothe the child, to stop him from crying. The baby was very tense. He was hungry; he was in pain; perhaps he sensed that no one seemed to care about him. The *mohel* was so heartbroken over the course of events that he joined in with the baby. So, the baby cried, and the *mohel* cried. Imagine the scene following the *bris*: the baby crying out of pain and hunger; the *mohel* crying because he

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was sad – for the baby, and sad for the parents, who were clueless about their religion.

In the meantime, the nanny showed up to confront a crying baby and a crying man. She apologized, claiming that she had been stuck in traffic due to an accident on the highway. The *mohel* thanked her for finally showing up. She fed the child. The *mohel* bid her good day and left.

Thirteen years later, the *mohel* had become a preeminent, much sought-after *mohel*. One day, the phone rang and a woman introduced herself and asked if her name jogged his memory. At first, he did not remember. Then it came back to him. She was the mother who had left him to perform a *bris* on her two-month old son. The *mohel* said that, yes, he did remember. After all, how could he forget what would go down as his most memorable *bris*? He immediately asked, “Did something happen to Yuval?” “No,” she answered, “he is fine.” She would like to consult with him concerning a pressing situation. Could he come to the house? The *mohel* agreed to come.

The *mohel* arrived and was greeted by the mother and her tall, handsome son. After exchanging greetings, the mother could no longer contain herself. “He wants to throw it all away. He wants to become observant!” she cried. “How could a boy whose parents are devoid of religion have a child that insists on becoming *frum*, observant?” she asked. “He insists on keeping kosher, observing *Shabbos*, and attend a *yeshivah*! Have you ever heard of something so outrageous?” she asked (in all innocence).

“We have taken him to the top psychologists and psychiatrists. They all agree that he is fine. How could he be fine, if this is what he wants to do?” she screamed. Indeed, she said that the doctors had warned them that if they do not give in, he will otherwise snap (emotionally). “Rabbi, you are the only observant Jew that we know. What should we do?”

The *mohel* thought for a few moments and then asked, “By the way, why did you select me as your son’s *mohel*? There were so many others, more experienced than I.” “Well, in the phone book under *mohel*, you were the first one, since your name begins with *aleph, A*,” she replied.

The *mohel* agreed to take Yuval under his wing, and, with his help in getting him started in *yeshivah*, over a short span of time, he quickly grew into a huge *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar. The *mohel* was ambivalent in his joy. On the one hand, Yuval must be an exceptional boy with an extraordinary mind, motivated by a unique thirst and drive for learning. So many others, however, just do not make it, despite caring parents and outstanding *rebbeim*. What was the secret behind Yuval’s success? It certainly was not his parents. The *mohel* went to a distinguished *Mekubal*, holy scholar knowledgeable in mysticism, to ask his question. Perhaps he would receive the correct answer to this pressing question.

The *Mekubal* asked him to describe what had taken place the day of the *Bris Milah*. The *mohel* related the entire story, and concluded, “I wept so much that day. I wept and the infant Yuval wept. The two of us alone wept incessantly.”

“You make a mistake,” the *Mekubal* said. “It was not just you and Yuval who were alone in the house that day. Elyahu *HaNavi* attends every *Bris*. When you and Yuval wept, it impressed Elyahu so much that he, too, joined in the weeping. The tears of Elyahu *HaNavi* supplementing

yours and those of the infant, Yuval, made such an impression in Heaven that it was decreed that Yuval would one day become a great Torah scholar!”

We never know the far-reaching effect achieved by our sincere prayer accompanied by tears.

**וביום הראות בו בשר חי וממא
On the day healthy flesh appears in it, it shall be contaminated. (13:14)**

On some specific days, the *Kohen* does not view a *nega*, plague. A *chassan*, bridegroom, who has a suspicious *nega* is allowed the *Shivas yimei hamishtah*, Seven days of celebration following his wedding. Likewise, one whose plague appeared at the onset of *Yom Tov* is permitted for the seven days of the Festival. Why is this? *Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl*, offers a practical explanation. The purpose of the *metzora*’s punishment is to knock him down a notch in his arrogance and in the way he treats his fellow man. He has an obnoxious manner of treating people, because he has convinced himself that he is better than they are. His punishment is commensurate with his actions. He created rifts among people with his malignant tongue; he will be locked up in solitude, so that he will experience a taste of his own medicine. Perhaps the seclusion and ensuing loneliness will spur him to think about the strife that he is causing. The loneliness will teach him what he has caused to happen to others. This might motivate a change in his attitude toward himself and others.

This is why he is not quarantined during his *Sheva brachos*, a time when joy permeates his life and worry has great difficulty creeping in. A person who is at the apex of joy or engrossed in the celebration of the Festival is not likely to condescend to the Heavenly punishment of *tzaraas*. He will ignore the lesson, because his mind is on something else. Indeed, during the festivities, he may even audaciously laugh off the punishment.

Thus, he is given his seven festive days – both nuptial and Festival, so that he can clear his mind, have his fun, and now confront the reality of his sins, their harmful effect on others – and on himself. With nothing to motivate insolence, he will hopefully confront his issues and repent.

Metzora

**וזאת תהיה תורת המצרע
This shall be the law of the metzora. (14:2)**

Tzaraas is a punishment visited upon a person whose morally-flawed character has caused him to slander a fellow Jew. It often begins with gossip and wratches up to full-fledged slander and character assassination. A spike in one’s self-esteem can catalyze an unbecoming arrogance, which allows a person to think – to actually believe – that he is better than others, that he can decide who is worthy and who is not. This self-generated haughtiness allows him to speak callously of others, to lord over them to the point that they become miserable. He is punished with *tzaraas*, an affliction which will deform him, cause him to be isolated; in short, he will feel the pain that he has caused others.

No one is perfect. Some of us are better than others at concealing our imperfections, while others specialize in finding faults, engendering animus, and being proud of it. After all, it is all part of their self-righteous nature, a haughtiness that encourages entitlement, because

“I am better than you.” If these same character-defective individuals would take the time to understand some of the challenges faced by others, they might even become more tolerant, patient and caring. When we categorize and judge people through our myopic lens, refusing to give others the benefit of the doubt, we destroy not only them – but also ourselves. Yes, there are people who have let us down, who have downright lied to us, who have hurt us both materially and emotionally, but they, too, have shortcomings. By overlooking their personal challenges which led them to act harshly toward us, we are encouraging them to continue in their downfall spiral. If we would just pause a moment to give the other fellow some latitude, we might discover later on that we have misread the situation.

Assuming responsibility requires an element of maturity which, unfortunately, is at a premium. This is especially true when there is someone readily available upon whom we might defer the onus of guilt. Raising children requires enormous responsibility which, regrettably, some parents relegate to the school. The *rebbeim/moros* become the sacrificial lamb for such parents who are inept and ineffective. Children growing up in such homes learn quickly that all of their problems are the result of the school and its faculty. The teacher soon becomes the enemy, and everything that he/she does, regardless of its positive motivation, is always viewed through a jaundiced perspective. The following story should give us something to consider before we misjudge and misspeak.

Rav Mendel Kravetz was a European Jew who emigrated from Vilna to Yerushalayim at the turn of the twentieth century. Any student of history is aware of the economic deprivation and hunger that prevailed in the old *yishuv* at the time. Despite the misery and squalor that was rampant, its inhabitants were satiated with boundless *simchas hachaim*, joy of life, in having the good fortune of living in Yerushalayim. *Rav Mendel* sought every which way to support his family of eight young children. Alas, no work was available. Finally, the *menahel*, principal of the *Talmud Torah*, offered him a job – to teach a class of twenty-five young boys. *Rav Mendel* was a saintly scholar whose pleasant disposition and caring manner made him a perfect candidate to imbue these young children with faith in Hashem and an appreciation and knowledge of His Torah. He excelled at this position for twenty years.

One day, the *menahel* summoned *Rav Mendel* to his office, “*Rav Mendel*, my dear friend, I have decided that at my advanced age, it be best that I retire, so that I can spend my twilight years totally engrossed in Hashem’s Torah. Veritably, this is what I always wanted to do, but at the time, my services as a *rebbe* and, later, as a *menahel* were vital to the community’s growth. I have given forty years of my life to this *Talmud Torah*. I ask you to serve as my replacement, to serve as the *menahel* of Talmud Torah Shoneh Halachos.”

Rav Mendel was overwhelmed, “Until now my responsibility extended to twenty five souls. Now I will be responsible for the spiritual and physical welfare of three hundred children!” He understood that a leadership position was not about money and esteem – it was about increased responsibility.

It did not take long before various students began to question *Rav Mendel*’s youngest child, “Why does your father walk around all day writing into a little notepad? Why

does he stare out of his office window, watching everything that we do? Is he observing our actions, so that he can mark down every negative thing – to save for later punishment?” These were the questions the students asked. Any educator whose own children were enrolled in his school knows quite well the piercing questions and negative innuendo with which his children must put up.

Eliezer, *Rav Mendel*’s youngest, was in sixth grade, and all of this negative chatter about his father was getting to him. They were constantly asking him to “borrow” his father’s notepad, read what was written there, and report back to them. Eliezer was an ethically-raised child who would never do such a thing as taking his father’s notepad. One day, however, when his father was called away while the notepad happened to be open on his desk – he took a peek. What he saw changed his appreciation of his father, and transformed his entire outlook on the definition of a *rebbe*. This is what he read: “*Moshele R.* has a torn jacket. This is the third day that he is wearing it. *Chaimke*’s pants are much too short. Asher B. is wearing shoes that are torn and distended. Winter is fast approaching. *Shimele A.* did not bring a slice of bread for lunch. I must remember to speak with Mr. Mandelbaum (a wealthy benefactor) for clothing contribution. These children cannot learn properly amidst such poverty. Rabbi Z. is drowning in debt. I must speak to the *Gemach*, charitable organization, to give him an advance.” The notepad continued with demands for *chesed*, kindness. His father would jot down daily the material needs of his students and faculty. This notepad was holy of holies! His father was a true *menahel*, who did not just address his students’ spiritual needs, but cared about their physical and emotional needs as well!

Understandably, when *Rav Mendel* was summoned to his Heavenly reward, a powerful void was left in the old *Yishuv*’s education system, which begged to be filled. “When our father passed away, we decided to bury his notepads with him. He was against it, but we, (his sons, all devout Torah scholars) felt that this was his ticket, his entrance to *Gan Eden*. We have no doubt that these notepads were a powerful and demanding intercessor on his part, which he received the true, just reward that he deserved.

How easy it is to misjudge, and how evil it is when we misspeak.

**ואם דל הוא ואין ידו משנות ולקה כבש אחד אשם
If he is poor and his means are not sufficient, then he shall take one male lamb as a guilt-offering. (14:21)**

The *Korban Asham*, guilt-offering, of the *metzora* is the same regardless of the financial status of the individual who offers it. Both the wealthy *metzora* and the poor *metzora* bring a male lamb as a guilt-offering. This is unlike the *Korban Chatas*, sin-offering, and *Olah*, elevation-offering, which are descending (*olah v’yoreid*) commensurate with the poor man’s ability to pay. *Horav Shmuel Rosenberg, zl*, *Rav* in Unsdorf, offers an illuminating but practical insight. The *Chatas* and *Olah* are *korbanos* which are brought for various sins. While a sin is a sin – and a sinner is a sinner, regardless of his economic status, poor or rich, he must bring a *korban* as part of his penance. His ability to pay, however, is taken into consideration. The Torah is not out to gouge someone. Thus, he pays in