

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

SKIN DEEP II

“...and it will become a tzara’at affliction on the skin of his flesh...” (13:2)

When G-d created the world, the light of G-dliness radiated from the entire universe like a beacon. Everyone could see clearly the Creator through His creation. As yet, evil had not dulled and masked His radiance in the world. After the sin of the first man, however, G-d hid his presence in the world behind the veil of nature. Thus, nature became more opaque, coarser, until it was virtually impossible to perceive that it is G-d Who sustains the world.

In Bereshet it says, “*And Hashem, G-d, made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them.*” (3:21)

The world was covered as with opaqueness — a “garment of skin” — hiding the inside of nature, just as the skin conceals the inside of the human body.

It’s interesting to note that the word for skin in Hebrew, *ohr*, can be pronounced *eevair*, which means a blind person. Just as the skin, as it were, blinds us to the inner reality and workings of the body, so too the opacity of nature blinds us to the inner reality of G-d’s running the world.

Of course, the skin is no more than a surface covering, and just as skin has pores — microscopic openings that allow air to enter the body and sweat to be expelled — so too does the “skin” of the world have its “pores” that allow us a view beyond the natural world. If we choose to look, we can see the rays of Divine Providence filtering through the cracks of existence. It’s not by coincidence that the words in Hebrew for both “skin” and “light” are pronounced the same way — *ohr*. For if we open up our eyes, the “skin” of the world that masks G-d’s Hand becomes a light that illuminates His Presence.

However, if those spiritual pores become clogged with the grime of this physical existence, then we lose that sensitivity to the transparency of the world’s “skin” and see nothing but happenstance in a random world.

This is “...*the tzara’at affliction on the skin of his flesh...*” From Above, the skin is afflicted when a person disconnects from the inner spiritual world and sees nothing but the outer world of nature.

It is the job of the *kohen* and the *kohanim* of all generations — those who teach Torah to the Jewish People — to turn that membrane of doubt and denial into a light which will light up the universe.

• *Based on the Sfat Emet*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah commands a woman to bring a *korban* after the birth of a child. A son is to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life. The Torah introduces the phenomenon of *tzara’at* (often mistranslated as leprosy) — a miraculous affliction that attacks people, clothing and buildings to awaken a person to spiritual failures. A *kohen* must be consulted to determine whether a particular mark is *tzara’at* or not. The *kohen* isolates the sufferer for a week.

If the malady remains unchanged, confinement continues for a second week, after which the *kohen* decides the person’s status. The Torah describes the different forms of *tzara’at*. One whose *tzara’at* is confirmed wears torn clothing, does not cut his hair, and must alert others that he is ritually impure. He may not have normal contact with people. The phenomenon of *tzara’at* on clothing is described in detail.

WHOSE CALENDAR IS THIS ANYWAY?

One of the beautiful things about living in Israel is that you don't hear the names of pagan deities when referring to the days of the week. In accordance with the Divine command to "Remember the Sabbath day" Jews here remember it all week long by counting the days in relation to Shabbat – "Yom Rishon", "Yom Sheini", etc.

It is, however, somewhat disturbing to see how little attention is paid to counting the days of the month according to the Hebrew calendar. This is hardly in the spirit of what we will hear this Shabbat in the synagogue when the chapter of "*Parshat Hachodesh*" is read in addition to the regular weekly portion.

"This month is yours" is how Moshe introduces the

first mitzvah given to the Jewish People while they were still in Egypt. Not only was this a command to sanctify each lunar month and to give primacy to the month of Nissan in which the Exodus took place, but is also a guideline for Jews throughout the generations to maintain a calendar based on the moon, in contrast to the other nations whose calendar is based on the sun.

It was therefore reassuring to note that the Israeli Knesset has finally passed a law in which the starting and concluding dates of the daylight savings season are no longer based on civil calendar dates but on Hebrew ones, which take into account the needs of the religious public.

This is a little step in the right direction to maintaining the Jewish nature of Israel forever.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

A CZECH COMMUNIST AND A CHIEF RABBI

When the former chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, recently said the "*Keil Malei Rachamim*" prayer on the site of the Auschwitz death camp 60 years after its liberation, it brought back memories of his own liberation from death as a child in the Buchenwald concentration camp.

His older brother Naftali smuggled the 7 ½ year old Yisrael Meir into the camp hidden in a knapsack. But when the Nazis ordered everyone to throw their belongings into an oven as a precaution against spreading disease, he was forced to jump out and join the line waiting to be inoculated by a doctor. This doctor, a Czech gentile imprisoned because of his Communist affiliation, stood there like a robot, injecting arms without even looking at the faces. Suddenly he saw no arm before him and looked down to see a little boy. "How old are you?" he asked and Yisrael Meir answered "Fifteen" as his brother had taught him to say so that he would not meet the fate of other children his age. After

asking his brother the same question and getting the same answer, the Czech turned to Naftali and pleaded: "Please tell me the truth. I am not one of them and you must tell me how old the boy is. If I administer an adult dose of the serum he could die from it and I am not a murderer." Naftali then revealed his brother's true age and the doctor spilled half of the serum on the ground before inoculating Yisrael Meir. Upon hearing that the youngster spoke fluent Polish, the doctor came up with an idea of how to improve his situation. He tore off the sleeve of a dead Pole and attached it with its letter "P" to Yisrael Meir's clothes. He then told the Nazi guards that this little Polish boy lost his parents in the bombing of Warsaw and should be put in the barracks of the Poles, which had far better conditions than the ones designated for the Jews.

Heaven has many agents and a Czech Communist was the one sent to assure the survival of a little boy who would someday become chief rabbi of the Jewish State.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When does a woman who has given birth to a son go to the *mikveh*?
2. After a woman gives birth, she is required to offer two types of offerings. Which are they?
3. What animal does the woman offer as a *chatat*?
4. Which of these offerings makes her *tahor* (ritual purity)?
5. Which of the sacrifices does the woman offer first, the *olah* or the *chatat*?
6. Who determines whether a person is a *metzora tamei* (person with ritually impure *tzara'at*) or is *tahor*?
7. If the *kohen* sees that the *tzara'at* has spread after one week, how does he rule?
8. What disqualifies a *kohen* from being able to give a ruling in a case of *tzara'at*?
9. Why is the appearance of *tzara'at* on the tip of one of the 24 "limbs" that project from the body usually unable to be examined?
10. On which days is a *kohen* not permitted to give a ruling on *tzara'at*?
11. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow (e.g., the head or beard), what color hair is indicative of ritual impurity?
12. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow, what color hair is indicative of purity?
13. If the *kohen* intentionally or unintentionally pronounces a *tamei* person "*tahor*," what is that person's status?
14. What signs of mourning must a *metzora* display?
15. Why must a *metzora* call out, "*Tamei! Tamei!*"?
16. Where must a *metzora* dwell?
17. Why is a *metzora* commanded to dwell in isolation?
18. What sign denotes *tzara'at* in a garment?
19. What must be done to a garment that has *tzara'at*?
20. If after washing a garment the signs of *tzara'at* disappear entirely, how is the garment purified?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 12:2 - At the end of seven days.
2. 12:6 - An *olah* and a *chatat*.
3. 12:6 - A *tor* (turtle dove) or a *ben yona* (young pigeon).
4. 12:7 - The *chatat*.
5. 12:8 - The *chatat*.
6. 13:2 - A *kohen*.
7. 13:5 - The person is *tamei*.
8. 13:12 - Poor vision.
9. 13:14 - The *tzara'at* as a whole must be seen at one time. Since these parts are angular, they cannot be seen at one time.
10. 13:14 - During the festivals; and ruling on a groom during the seven days of feasting after the marriage.
11. 13:29 - Golden.
12. 13:37 - Any color other than golden.
13. 13:37 - He remains *tamei*.
14. 13:45 - He must tear his garments, let his hair grow wild, and cover his lips with his garment.
15. 13:45 - So people will know to keep away from him.
16. 13:46 - Outside the camp in isolation.
17. 13:46 - Since *tzara'at* is a punishment for *lashon hara* (evil speech), which creates a rift between people, the Torah punishes measure for measure by placing a division between him and others.
18. 13:49 - A dark green or dark red discoloration.
19. 13:52 - It must be burned
20. 13:58 - Through immersion in a *mikveh*.

OHR BITS

Witty Advice for Circling Life

"Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off your goals."

• AVI SHULMAN

BERACHOT 37 - 43

- After-blessings on grain, on rice and on dates
- Blessing on various dishes made from grain
- Blessing on medicine
- Exact text of blessing on bread
- Blessing on cooked vegetables
- Size of an olive
- Priority in blessing on variety of breads and in tithing onions
- How to “break bread” with its blessing
- Interruption between blessing on bread and eating
- Feeding your animal before yourself
- Tips on cleanliness and nutrition
- Particularity in blessings and the all-inclusive one
- Components of a blessing
- Priority in blessings on fruits
- Blessing on fruits and on wine in a meal of bread
- Blessings on fragrances and on fruit trees in blossom
- Proper behavior for a Torah scholar

A VERY SPECIAL BLESSING

The after-blessing on food which is probably the one most frequently said is called *Borei Nefashot*. It is a short blessing we make after enjoying any food

which is not one of the seven species listed in the Torah as being a source of praise for Eretz Yisrael, and on any drink except wine.

What does this blessing consist of that qualifies it to serve as our recognition for such a wide range of Heavenly kindness?

After the usual beginning of all blessings in which we pay homage to G-d as the source of all blessings and sovereign of the universe, we declare that “He created many souls and all their needs.” This refers to the basic necessities of life such as bread and water. We then continue with words of appreciation “for all You have created”. This refers to all the things we could survive without and were created simply for our pleasure.

This explanation of this very special blessing provided by Tosefot demonstrates how the Sages formulated the blessings we say to serve as educational experiences in addition to expressions of our indebtedness to our Creator. Just as we make a blessing before partaking of the necessities and luxuries which are Heavenly property until we express our dependence on G-d, so too must we express our appreciation of Heavenly bounty after enjoying it.

• *Berachot 37a*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Take a look at how different is the way of G-d from that of man. Man can only fill an empty vessel, not a full one, whereas in receiving Torah from G-d only a full vessel (a man who has once made an effort to learn) has the ability to become even fuller.”

• *Rabbi Zeira - Berachot 40a*

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

MIKVEH OF THE ARYZAL

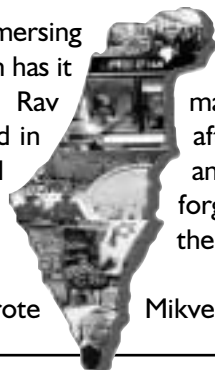
Visitors to Tzfat usually make a point of immersing themselves in the “Ary’s Mikveh”. Tradition has it that Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, (Adoneinu Rav Yitzchak), the great kabbalist who lived and died in that city, promised that anyone who immersed himself in that mikveh would not leave this world before repenting his sins.

But why is it called the Ary’s Mikveh? His disciple, Rabbi Chaim Vital, reportedly wrote

the following:

“Our master, of blessed memory, commanded us to immerse his body in the mikveh after his passing. When we took his body there and immersed it in the water, we begged him to forgive us. He then straightened himself up and did the immersion by himself.”

From that day on it was called the “Ary’s Mikveh”.



HAVE A GREAT DAY

From: Steve in Ann Arbor, MI

Dear Rabbi,

I saw in a calendar that the Shabbat before Pesach is called "Shabbat HaGadol". Does this mean "The Great Shabbat"? What is the significance of this?

Dear Steve,

The Jews in Egypt on the eve of the Exodus were given their first mitzvah (the Torah had not yet been given) which applied to that generation only: "Speak to the entire community of Israel saying, On the tenth of this month, let each one take a lamb for each home...And you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the month, and the entire congregation of the community of Israel shall slaughter it in the afternoon. And they shall take of the blood and put it on the doorposts and on the lintel...And on this night, they shall eat the meat, roasted over the fire, and unleavened cakes; with bitter herbs they shall eat it" (Ex. 12).

Sefer HaPardes, ascribed to Rashi, explains that the Jews went out of Egypt on a Thursday. Therefore the taking of the lamb on the tenth of the month was on Shabbat. The Jews declared, "If we sacrifice lambs which are sacred to the Egyptians before their very eyes, surely they will stone us." But G-d said to them, "Now you will see the wonderful thing I will do for you." Whereupon each Jew took his Pesach offering and kept it for four days. When the Egyptians saw this, they wanted to take revenge against the Jews but they were stricken with all kinds of bodily suffering and could not harm them. On account of the miracles that were done on that day, the Sabbath before Passover is known as Shabbat HaGadol.

There are other reasons given as to why this Shabbat is called 'HaGadol'. Just as a child who is of the age to keep the *mitzvot* is called a *gadol* (an adult), so too the day on which the Jewish People 'came of age' and were commanded with their first mitzvah is called 'HaGadol' (Chizkuni). When the Jews were in Egypt, Moses asked Pharaoh to let them rest on Shabbat. Each week when the Sabbath ended, they returned to their wearisome toil. After the Shabbat when they took the lambs, they did not return to their slavery and therefore it was called 'Shabbat HaGadol', the long Sabbath (Mabit). On this Shabbat large congregations would gather to learn the laws of Pesach and this day was therefore called 'Shabbat HaGadol' because on it people gathered in large assemblies and learned much about great (important) laws (Tzeda Laderech).

WHY WEAR WHITE

From: Ian in Tampa, FL

Dear Rabbi,

Is there any special clothing to be worn at the Seder? I seem to remember my grandfather wearing all white.

Dear Ian,

In general, as on all festivals, we wear our finest clothing. One should try to the best of one's ability to buy new clothing for one's family in honor of this great day, and wear nice clothing in honor of the entire holiday which lasts seven days (or eight days outside of Israel). In fact, a husband is required to buy his wife a gift of clothing, jewelry or something else that makes her happy in honor of the festival.

Regarding wearing white, it is customary among Ashkenazim for the head of the household to wear a plain white garment or robe, called a *kittel* in Yiddish, during the Seder. Several reasons are given for this custom:

Curiously enough, in some ways the wearing of white on the Seder night is associated with death, as the dead are buried in white burial shrouds. One reason for this is to instill a feeling of humility as we recline, to recall our humble beginnings and appreciate G-d's mercy in having taken us out of slavery. The hard boiled eggs eaten at the Seder (in addition to representing the festival-offering) are considered a mourner's food and also conjure up this idea of humility. Of course, the lowly, unleavened matzah clearly communicates this night's emphasis on humility. Another reason for this curious undercurrent of death and mourning at the festive meal is that Tisha b'Av, the day of the destruction of the Temples, always occurs on the same day of the week as the first night of Passover.

However, other commentators interpret the custom of wearing white quite differently. They maintain that there is nothing finer than to officiate the Seder in a plain white garment. For it was thus that the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctuary, once a year at the pinnacle of the Yom Kippur service. On this night, each Jew who celebrates the sacred Seder is like the High Priest performing the most holy service.

This custom of wearing a white garment at the Seder is not observed among Sephardi Jews. To this day, many Yemenite Jews wear traditional garb at the Seder, including colorful robes and turbans. Some have the custom to reenact the Exodus in a small type of skit during the Seder.

PASSING ON THE PAVEMENT

Question: I realize that this question is very different from the ones you usually deal with. It may be “way out of left field” but it is one that has always bothered me. What happens when you are walking on the pavement and someone is walking in the opposite direction right towards you! How can you avoid a collision?

Answer: When I was in elementary school our teacher taught us that you should walk to the right. This might have been an subconscious application of the Talmudic dictum that “every turn you make should be to the right”. No such application is, however, made by our

Sages and there is a built-in flaw because the fellow coming towards you may not have gone to the same school.

A general rule in human affairs which emerges from the ethical writings of our Torah scholars is that one should avoid being “pushy”. Applying this to the situation you describe, the best advice would be to pause for a moment and gracefully signal to the oncoming pedestrian to pass you on either your right or left.

Not only will you thus avoid a collision but you will make the other fellow feel good that someone showed him such deference.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

It's Me!

Shalom, I just had a mind-blowing experience. I am a descendant of the father and daughter mentioned in the article by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach (“I Have No Other Father”). Is there anyway I can get in touch with him to inquire about where and how he got this info? Thanks so much.

• Glenn Pitzer

Ohrnet replies: The story “I Have No Other Father” appears on page 504 of a work in Hebrew called “Aleinu Leshabeiach - Sefer Shmot” authored by Moshe Michael Tsoren who resides at 6 Ezra Attiah Street, Ramat Elchanan, Bnei Brak. His telephone number is 03-677-6168. This is all the information we have on this matter.

Purim Reprint in Missouri

I am writing to request permission to copy your article for summaries of Halachot of Purim in my synagogue newsletter. We are a small Orthodox shul in St. Louis, MO. It is a very small circulation newsletter; it goes out to about 100 or so subscribers in the PDF format (every week it is tem-

porarily posted on our website for about 4-5 days, after which the old issue is replaced with the new one). I was also wondering if it would be OK for me to periodically use articles found on your website in this newsletter without having to get permission each time.

• Mikhail

Ohrnet replies: Please use the material with credit attributed to Ohr.edu and Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem.

Purim Archives

I'm looking for an archive issue of Ohrnet from Shabbat Zachor/Purim 5758 and 5759. I remember those two to be quite humorous. I can't seem to find my hard copies that I had stored away. Do you have them archived? If you do can you e-mail them to me at the above address? Thank you for taking the time to respond to this matter. Simchat Purim

• Yitzie P.

Ohrnet replies: We personally think that all the Ohrnet Purim issues are fun and happy and you can find them all at <http://ohr.edu/yhiy.php/holidays/purim/>

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