

Uncovering What Is Already There

In this week's parsha, Tazria, we have the mitzvah of Bris, circumcision, "When a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy... And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised."

There are two parts to the mitzvah of Bris. First that a boy should be circumcised, and that it should be done "on time," on the eighth day. And it would seem that if for some reason, the Bris could not be done "on time," for example, if he was sick and it would be dangerous to do it, when he finally has a Bris at a later time, the child would have the mitzvah of being circumcised, and we know that it is a mitzvah to have a Bris at a later time, because we say a blessing with Hashem's name, but the part about being "on time," would be lost. Even though it is in accordance with Torah law, because "saving a life pushes off (any obligation of) the whole Torah," It will help from now on, but it would seem that the time from the eighth day until the Bris is lost.

The Rambam explains why we don't do a Bris on a sick baby. Because it puts his life in danger, and "When a life is in danger, it pushes off everything, and the circumcision could be done at a later time, and it is impossible (l'hachazir) to bring back one soul of Israel, ever."

The Rambam gives two reasons not to do the Bris. First, "When a life is in danger, it pushes off everything," meaning, that even if it can't be done at a later time, because of the danger, it is okay, since saving a life takes precedence, Second, since "it could be done at a later time," which implies that it doesn't get pushed off at all, because it could be done at a later time. Meaning that if it's done at a later time, it will help for the time that passed and it would be considered on time.

The only thing is that it won't be able to push off Shabbos, because our sages have a special teaching for that, it says, "On the (eighth) day, (meaning) even on Shabbos." Only when it's on the eighth day, does it push off Shabbos.

This is difficult to understand, because: How can a Bris that is done in the future have an effect on the past? A physical act is done when it is done, it can't change the past.

The only time the future can have an effect on the past, is when the act that is done in the future reveals or uncovers that it was truly that way all the time. Or when a deal is struck that is dependent on a future event, "if you do such and such next week, then it is yours from now." But when it comes to a Bris, it is done when it is done. An effect can't come before the cause. So how can a late Bris change the past, as if he had a Bris the whole time? And how can it be on time?

Another question. The words of the Rambam, "And it is impossible (l'hachazir) to bring back one soul of Israel, ever," seem out of place. He places it after, "And the circumcision could be done at a later time," it would make more sense to put it after, "When a life is in danger, it pushes off everything." Why does the Rambam put it after "it could be done at a later time"?

The Alter Rebbe explains that the mitzvah of Bris draws a light from Hashem that is greater than any that could be drawn through the service of people. It is bestowed from above. It is a light that is in our essence, but it can't be revealed until he has a Bris, it is always there, but it is blocked until he has a Bris.

The same thing is with the entry of the neshama into the body, it happens when he has a Bris. This doesn't mean that he doesn't have a neshama, rather, that it is blocked from effecting the world in the way a Jew is meant to. His neshama doesn't shine to the world until the Bris. It is always there but it is not revealed until the Bris.

Since it is always there, it is not a new physical thing that didn't exist before, rather the Bris reveals what was always there. Therefore it could affect the past. And therefore it is considered on time, because when it is revealed it shows that it was always there, and if it was always there, it is by definition, on time.

And now we will understand why the Rambam put the statement, "And it is impossible (l'hachazir) to bring back one soul of Israel, ever," after "And it could be done at a later time." Because it adds a deeper layer of understanding.

The simple meaning is that "When a life is in danger, it pushes off everything," because "it is impossible (l'hachazir) to bring back one soul of Israel, ever."

But it could be understood in a different way. The word l'hachazir, which means to bring back, could also mean to go back or undo.

As explained above, "And the circumcision could be done at a later time," means that when a boy has a Bris at a later time, it helps for the time that he wasn't able to have it, this is because he was really always connected to Hashem, as every Jewish person is always connected to Hashem.

A Jew is actually one with Hashem. And it is the deepest part of the neshama that is one with Him. That is what is revealed with a Bris. This connection can never be undone, so the words of the Rambam could be understood as, "And it is impossible for a soul of Israel to go back (on his connection with Hashem), ever."

And it works both ways, as the Talmud tells us that Hashem says, "Whatever may be, they are My children, and to trade them for another nation (G-d forbid) is impossible."

Hashem truly loves each and every one of us, we are one with Him and He is one with us. It is through serving Him in a way that is beyond our understanding, which the mitzvah of Bris represents - because it is done when a boy is a baby and doesn't understand what is being done - that we reveal the essence of our neshama, and draw the highest levels of G-dly light into the world. It is not something new, it is always there, because that is who we are.

May we reveal our essence through serving Hashem beyond our understanding, and fill the world with G-dly light, this will surely hasten the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

Haftora: Appreciating The Miracles In Our Lives

The Haftora for parshas Tazria is not read often, because in most years Tazria and Metzora are read together, and when that happens, the Haftora for Metzora is read. Even in a leap year, when Tazria is read by itself, it is often also parshas Hachodesh, and the Haftora for Hachodesh is read instead.

The Haftora tells of two miracles of our prophet Elisha.

In the first miracle, a man brought Elisha 20 bread rolls made of the barley flour that recently ripened. Elisha told his helper to give it to his students whom he supported. His helper asked him, "How can I give this to a hundred men? (It's simply not enough)." Elisha responded, "Give it to the people to eat, for Hashem said, 'They will eat and have left over.'" He gave it to them, they ate and there was leftover, just as Hashem said.

The second miracle was how he cured Naaman from Tzaraas. Naaman was the commander of the king of Aram's army, he was very well respected, because Hashem gave him many victories, but now he couldn't go out to war because he was afflicted with Tzaraas.

One of Aram's raiding parties captured a young girl from Israel, and she became a servant to Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If my master's request will be brought before the prophet in Shomron (Elisha), then he will cure him of his Tzaraas." We see here, the power of a young Jewish girl's simple faith in the Tzadik of the time, that brought about such a beautiful miracle and positive geopolitical ramifications as well, as we will soon see.

Naaman went and told the king what the young girl said. The king told him to go to the prophet, and that he would send a letter to the king of Israel, telling him to instruct the prophet to cure Naaman.

Naaman took a tremendous amount of silver, gold and garments, as a gift for the prophet, and he brought the letter to the king of Israel. When the king read the letter he rend his garments, because he was afraid that it was a trick, and that the king of Aram was using this as a pretext to go to war. Aram was the superpower of the region at that time, so the mere thought of going to war with them was terrifying.

When Elisha heard that the king rend his garments, he sent a message to him, "Why did you rend your garments? Let him come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel."

Naaman came with a whole entourage to Elisha's house and stood at the door. Elisha didn't come out to meet him, he just sent a messenger to tell him to wash in the Jordan seven times, his skin will be restored and he will be ritually pure.

Naaman got angry and left, he expected Elisha to honor him by coming out to greet him, call out to Hashem, wave his hand over the Tzaraas, and it would miraculously go away. But instead, he told him to bathe in the Jordan. He said that the rivers in Damascus are better than any of the waters in Israel, he often bathed in them, and it didn't help him.

His servants approached him and respectfully suggested, that if the prophet would have told him to do something difficult, he would surely have listened to him, so now that he said to do something easy, shouldn't he try it? He took their advice and bathed in the Jordan seven times like Elisha said, and his skin became like that of a young boy.

Naaman and his entourage returned to Elisha. Naaman stood before him and said, "Now I know that there isn't any G-d in the whole world other than in Israel, now, please accept a gift from your

servant." But Elisha refused to take anything, he said, "By the Living G-d before Whom I stood (as a soul in the higher realms, before entering into the body), I can't accept (any gift)." Naaman begged him to take something, but he refused. Then he asked for two mule loads of earth from Israel, so that he could make it into an altar for Hashem, and he proclaimed, "For your servant will no longer offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to other gods, but only to Hashem!"

Then he asked for forgiveness in advance, because he will have to go with his king when he goes to serve his idols, and he won't have a choice, but to bow with him. He said, "May Hashem please forgive your servant for this." And Elisha said to him, "Go in peace." From here we learn, that a gentile who accepted on himself to serve only Hashem, and to keep the Seven Laws that were given to the Children of Noah, is not obligated to sacrifice his life to sanctify Hashem. If he would be obligated, Elisha would have told him so, and that he could not bow. Instead he just told him to "go in peace."

This, of course, was a great geo-political victory for the Jewish people, because now Naaman, the commander of the most powerful army in the region, became an ally to Israel. Also, I am sure that the story of the miracle reverberated throughout the region, and was a great sanctification of Hashem's name.

The second miracle seems to connect well with the parsha. Parshas Tazria talks mostly about the laws of the Metzora, and the miracle was how Elisha cured Naaman, a Metzora, from Tzaraas. But how does the first miracle, about the loaves of bread, connect to our parsha?

Rashi and the Radak provide the explanation. Rashi says that it was "During Pesach, when grain ripens." The Radak says, "It was from the first barley that was harvested, it was the time of the barley harvest." The Ralbag, Metzudas David and Metzudas Tzion say similar things. In this instance, the Haftora is also connected with the time of year.

Whenever Tazria is read by itself, it is in the month of Nissan, before Pesach, or on the Shabbos before, when we bless the month of Nissan. The month of Nissan is a time of miracles, the time when the barley ripens and is harvested, and on Pesach the Omer offering, which was from barley, was brought in the Temple. The first miracle is about barley in the month of Nissan.

This also adds more meaning to the second miracle, because Tazria doesn't have anything to do with open miracles. So how does the miracle aspect connect to the parsha? It doesn't necessarily, rather, it is connected to the time of year, Nissan, a time of miracles.

I use the term "open miracles," because, of course, Tazria speaks about pregnancy and birth, which are miracles, but they are the kind of miracles that Hashem put into nature. Also, Tzaraas was not a natural ailment, it was not leprosy, it was a spiritual condition, that came because of spiritual reasons. So in a way, it was a miracle as well. But being that it was more common, it was not like an open miracle. However, though these kind of miracles are more common, they are still miracles, and perhaps the Haftora is highlighting the point of miracles, to let us know, that we should see and value the miracles in nature and the more common miracles we experience every day.

We are left with a question. Why did Elisha refuse Naaman's gift? We have rules about when one may accept tzedakah from an idol worshipper, generally we shouldn't, but there are certain situations where we can accept it secretly, and in certain dire situations, one is permitted to take it openly. However, Naaman wasn't an idol worshipper, he proclaimed openly that he will only serve Hashem. The Rambam says that from this kind of person, you can accept tzedakah and distribute it even to Jewish needy. So why didn't he accept it?

From the Rambam's words, "If... He gave, we accept it," we understand that only after the fact do we accept it, but to begin with we don't. The Rambam also says there, "If he wants to do a mitzvah... in order to receive merit, we don't stop

him." Again, we don't stop him, but to begin with, if he wants to make it a regular thing, we would not allow it, because it is as if he is creating a new religion and the Rambam says, that this is not allowed.

And perhaps, the miracle and the whole experience was all the more powerful, and a greater sanctification of Hashem's name, because he didn't take the gift. And therefore, it had a greater effect on Naaman and all that heard what transpired.

May we experience and value the miracles in our daily lives. And may we merit to experience the greatest miracle of all, the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

If It All Turned White It Is Pure

Most of the parsha of Tazria tells us the laws of diagnosing and quarantining a Metzora. It begins to say that if a person notices a white patch develop on his skin, he should be brought before a Kohen, only a Kohen can pronounce a person ritually impure on account of Tzaraas. If the Kohen sees that hair inside the patch changed from its color to white or the white patch appears deeper than the skin around it, it is definitely Tzaraas and the Kohen pronounces him ritually impure. If however he doesn't see one of these signs, the Kohen will quarantine the person for seven days. On the seventh day, the Kohen reexamines the person. If he sees one of the signs or if the patch became bigger, he is pronounced impure. If it becomes smaller or darker than the usual shades of Tzaraas, it is not Tzaraas. If it is the same as it was the first time he was examined, the Kohen quarantines him for another seven days.

On the seventh day, the Kohen reexamines him as before, and the same rules apply, except that this time, if the patch remains the same, it is not Tzaraas, and he is pronounced ritually pure of Tzaraas.

In a case that the Kohen determined that it was indeed not Tzaraas, the person must wash his

clothes and go to the mikvah and he is pure. In other words, even though he is not a Metzora, he was considered impure, but at a lower level of impurity.

Then the Torah seems to continue with these laws, but for some reason, it starts with a verse, as if it is beginning a new subject. "If a person has a patch of (what appears to be) Tzaraas, he is brought to the Kohen." Then the Torah continues with more details about diagnosing a Metzora. It adds that if some skin within the white patch appears fresh, like normal skin, it is another sign that it is definitely Tzaraas. It is just an old patch of Tzaraas that fresh skin started to grow on. Then it says that if the patch spread over the entire person's body, meaning everywhere the Kohen can see, he is pronounced ritually pure. Later, if fresh skin appears somewhere on his body, the Kohen will pronounce him impure, because his whole body isn't completely covered.

Why does the Torah start this as if it is a new subject? Why didn't it continue with something like, "And if the Kohen sees fresh skin..."? As it does in the following verse, "And if the Tzaraas erupts on the skin, that the Tzaraas covers all the skin with the patch, from his head until his feet, wherever the eyes of the Kohen can see. The Kohen examines it, if it covers all his skin, he pronounces the patch ritually pure, if it all turned white, he is pure." There is even a break in the Torah before and after these laws, indicating that it is a separate subject. If it is just adding more details about Tzaraas, it is not a new subject. So there must be something very unique here that the Torah deems it necessary to start it as a new subject. What is the new idea that we learn from here?

To understand this, let us look at another difficulty in this passage.

The verse says, "If it all turned white, he is ritually pure." The Torahs Kohanim and the Rambam say, that this only applies when the Kohen first pronounced him ritually impure, and then it spread all over. But if the person appears before the Kohen to begin with and it's all over his body, or after he

was already pronounced ritually pure, it then spread all over, he is impure.

However, Rashi, who explains the simple meaning of the verse, doesn't say anything, leading us to believe, that it doesn't matter what the circumstance is, "If it all turned white," he is pure.

Torahs Kohanim and the Rambam tell us the law, Rashi, on the other hand, doesn't come to teach us the final law, rather, to teach us the simple meaning of the verse. It is common that the law is different from the simple meaning. The Torah has many levels of interpretation, there is the simple meaning, the legal, the esoteric, and more. They each teach us different things, they connect to different aspects of our lives. So it is okay if they disagree with each other. However, when we see this kind of disagreement, we have to ask: What is the underlying factors of this disagreement? And what can we learn from them?

The Torahs Kohanim and the Rambam are looking at the legal aspect of the verse. All of the laws of purity and impurity are biblical decrees. That means that they are what they are, we don't use logic to infer anything else from them, and we apply the law to that specific case and no other scenario.

Being that the law of, "If it all turned white," comes right after the law, that when fresh skin appears within a white patch, the Kohen pronounces him ritually impure, we must conclude, that only after he is pronounced impure, and then it spreads all over, is he pure.

Rashi on the other hand, is explaining the simple meaning. According to the simple meaning, the reason that, "If it all turned white," is pure, is because of logical reasoning. Because, now that it spread all over his body, we recognize that it is not Tzaraas, rather the natural condition of his skin, and that is why he is pure, it was never Tzaraas to begin with.

Now we can understand why it is a new subject. Because it is teaching us about a case that was

never Tzaraas to begin with. Being that it has nothing to do with Tzaraas, it is a new subject.

This will help us understand something that the Talmud says.

The Talmud says, "The son of David (Moshiach) won't come until all the kingdoms will turn over to heresy. Rava asks: What is the verse (that proves this point)? 'if it all turned white, he is ritually pure.'" And Rashi explains, "Just as with a patch that spread all over the skin, when all the kingdoms will turn over to heresy, redemption will come."

This Talmudic passage is also found where the Talmud tells us signs that we are in "ikvisa d'mishicha," the time just before the coming of Moshiach.

Why will Moshiach come when the whole world will become heretical? There are two ways to understand this, in line with the two approaches to "If it all turned white," that it is either a biblical decree or a logical reasoning.

The first way of looking at it, is that things will be so bad that there will be no choice but for Hashem to send Moshiach. Just like a biblical decree, it is from the top down, directly from Hashem, without our input.

The second way of looking at it, is that the whole world becoming heretical is a point of clarity, when they will all recognize that they have nothing to do with Hashem, and it will become clear that only we do. Then Moshiach will come and they will want to learn from us, therefore, we will have a tremendous effect on the world, and we will all serve Hashem together, as it says, "For then I will convert the nations to a pure language that all of them call in the name of Hashem, to worship Him of one accord." This is from the bottom up, like logical reasoning it will come from the world's understanding.

This is similar to what the Talmud says about the Jewish people, "The son of David (Moshiach) won't come but in a generation that everybody is

deserving or that everybody is undeserving. In a generation that everybody is deserving, as it says, 'And your nation are all righteous, they will forever inherit the land.' In a generation that everybody is undeserving, as it says, 'And He saw that there was no (righteous) man, and He was astounded that there was no one to intercede.' And it says, 'For My sake, for My sake I will do.'"

Since the Rambam rules that, "The Torah assures us, that in the end Yisrael will do teshuva at the end of their exile and they will be redeemed immediately." Meaning, that we will do teshuva because we want to, and we will be deserving. We can conclude that the nations of the world, because of our influence, being a light on to them, teaching them what Hashem wants from them, to keep the Seven Mitzvahs that were given to the Children of Noah, they will deserve it too.

By being a light on to the nation, they will become a help to us in completing our mission. This will surely hasten the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

Positive Outcomes Of Struggles And Pain

In this week's parsha, Tazria, we read about the Metzora, one afflicted by a spiritual ailment called Tzaraas, in which a patch of his skin, hair, etc., takes on different colors, textures, etc.

In the Talmud, a question is asked: "What is Moshiach's name? The Rabbis (the majority opinion) say, (he is called) the Metzora of the house of Rebbe.

The Midrash, on the verse "and the Metzora that has the lesion," explains, "Metzora, this is the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple."

Usually we see a Metzora as an outcast, afflicted because of some wrongdoing. However, it seems from here, that a Metzora is a good thing. The holiest man, Moshiach, and the holiest place, the Beis Hamikdash, are called Metzora.

Why then are Moshiach and the Beis Hamikdash called Metzarah?

To understand this, first we have to understand why there hasn't been a Metzarah since the time of the Temple.

During the Temple era, when people went up to the Temple they beheld the Divine presence, they witnessed miracles regularly. The people were of a different caliber as well, they were able to reach spiritual heights that are unattainable now in exile.

The Metzarah was a person who was at the highest level. He worked on refining himself until he had absolutely no trace of evil left in him, neither in his inner spiritual makeup nor in his outer physical makeup. The only thing that was left was the remnants of impurities he once had. These remnants come out as Tzaras.

Today, there are no longer people at these spiritual heights, hence there are no Metzarahs.

Now we can understand why Moshiach and the Beis Hamikdash are called Metzarah. Because a Metzarah is a spiritual giant and because they are both connected to our redemption from this dark exile. In this exile we suffered unimaginable pain, this suffering also acts as a purifier, and cleanses us. Now at the end of the exile, all that is left is mere remnants. Moshiach and the Beis Hamikdash come to redeem us from these remnants.

All of us have pain in our lives, this is the condition of our exile. It helps, albeit a little, that the pangs of the exile have meaning, as they bring the redemption.

Laying here in my bed, receiving visitors and getting emails. Many have shared their pain with me, but at the same time, most found that as a result of their pain, they have attained some positive outcome, they never would have imagined they could have attained, had they not gone through their struggle.

I have experienced this first hand. Being sick has been a struggle for me, for my wonderful wife, and for my family. But this struggle has brought out love, talents, strength and inspiration we never knew we had.

So it seems in some way that our pain and suffering is good, just as a Metzarah is the holiest person.

Who am I kidding, we have suffered enough. It is time for Moshiach, the Metzarah of the house of Rebbe, to come and redeem us from this exile. May it happen soon.

This Dvar Torah is dedicated to my daughter Chava, who's Bas Mitzvah is today. I am so proud of you Chava.