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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

So Far Away

"The Kohen shall look, and behold! the affliction has covered his entire flesh, then he will declare the affliction to be pure." (13:13)

T*zara'at*, frequently mistranslated as leprosy, was a disease caused by spiritual defects, such as speaking *lashon hara* (slander). (Nowadays we are on such a low level spiritually that our bodies do not reflect the state of our spiritual health in this way.)

The verse here is puzzling for if "the affliction has covered the entire flesh" of the person that must mean that he is far from pure, and yet the Torah

tells us that the Kohen shall "declare the affliction pure". How can he be pure if the affliction covers his whole body?

The answer is that he is so far from being cured, having ignored all the warnings to do *teshuva* repentance, that the disease ceases to perform any further purpose. Thus the Torah specifically says not that the Kohen shall declare him pure, rather that "the affliction is pure" he, on the other hand, is as far from purity as is possible.

- Based on the *Ha'amek Davar* and Rabbi S. R. Hirsch

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Q & A

TAZRIA

Questions

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?

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

Answers

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*.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Haircut Time

The term *giluach* (“shaving,” “haircutting”) and its cognates appear some twenty-three times in the Bible, thirteen of which are in the Pentateuch. The plurality of such appearances is in the passages concerning the *metzora* (roughly, “leper”) and the Nazirite, whose respective completion ceremonies require ritual tonsuring, in which he must shave his hair (Lev. 14:8-9, Num. 6:9, 6:18-19). In this essay we will explore various Hebrew roots related to the act of haircutting, including *giluach*, *gizah*, *galav* and *sapar*. In doing so we will examine the etymologies of these various synonyms and try to better understand how they might actually differ from one another.

Let’s begin with the term *giluach*, whose root is GIMMEL-LAMMED-CHET. Predicated on the interchangeability of the letters HEY, AYIN, and CHET, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 9:21) sees a common theme among words derived from the roots GIMMEL-LAMMED-HEY (*gilui*, “reveal”), GIMMEL-LAMMED-AYIN (*gala*, “open”), and GIMMEL-LAMMED-CHET (*giluach*, “shaving”). He understands that they all refer back to “exposing” something and bringing something new to the forefront. Thus, in Rabbi Hirsch’s understanding, the word *giluach* primarily refers to cutting hair as a means of *exposing* the surface of one’s skin that had until now been covered by hair. This idea bears a close resemblance to Rabbi Hirsch’s understanding of how the word *ta’ar* (“razor”) derives from the root AYIN-REISH-HEY (“laying bare, exposing”), as I discussed in a previous essay (“Razor’s Edge,” May 2018).

Rabbi David Golumb (1861-1935) in *Targumna* (to Lev. 14:9) writes that the root GIMMEL-LAMMED-CHET is related to the root CHET-GIMMEL-LAMMED by metathesis, and that latter root is another form of the root AYIN-GIMMEL-LAMMED (“round”), by way of the interchangeability of CHET and AYIN. Accordingly, he explains that when the Bible uses

the word *giluach*, it implies both a connection to *gilui* (i.e., “revealing” skin that was previously covered in hair, per Rabbi Hirsch above), as well as a connection to *igul* (i.e., the “circular” motion of cutting the hair on one’s head).

As an aside, although Rabbi Golumb mentioned the root CHET-GIMMEL-LAMMED, no words from this root actually appear in the Bible. But in rabbinic literature, the rabbis say that a widowed woman who is *chaglah* (“goes around”), acquires for herself a bad reputation (*Yerushalmi Sotah* 3:4), and the *Sefer HaAruch* even has an entry for this root based on his version of *Bereishet Rabbah* 18:3. Nevertheless, the Biblical personal name Chaglah (Num. 26:33, 27:1, 36:11, Joshua 17:3) – given to one of Zelophechad’s daughters – and the place-name Bet Chaglah (Joshua 15:6, 18:19, 18:21) seem to be derived from this root. Rabbi Avraham Abulafia (1240-1291) writes that the given name Chaglah is derived from the root CHET-GIMMEL-LAMMED, which he explains as a permutation of AYIN-GIMMEL-LAMMED.

Interestingly, the word *galach* came to mean “(Christian) priest” in Medieval Hebrew and Yiddish, because such priests typically shaved their head hair. As far as I know, Rashi was the first to use this term in this way (see my earlier essay, “Holy Priests vs. Unholy Priests,” Dec. 2019).

Another Biblical term for “cutting hair” is *gizah/gezizah* (verb form: *gozez*), whose root is GIMMEL-ZAYIN-(ZAYIN). In his work *Yeriot Shelomo*, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) writes that both *giluach* and *gizah* refer to “haircutting,” but the difference between these terms lies in *whose* hair is cut. He explains that *giluach* in the Bible always refers to cutting a *person’s* hair, while *gizah* typically refers to cutting an *animal’s* hair (wool). Thus, for example, when the Bible refers to Joseph getting a haircut before meeting Pharaoh (Gen. 41:14), or shaving the *metzora* as part of his purification process (Lev.

14:9), or a Nazirite as part of his completion ceremony (Num. 6:18), or the prohibition against shaving one's beard (Lev. 21:5), the word used in these cases is *giluach*. On the other hand, when Judah went to shear his sheep (Gen. 31:19) and when the Torah commands presenting one's animal's first shearing to a Kohen (Deut. 18:4), the word used in these instances is *gizah*. That said, Rabbi Pappenheim admits that *gizah* can also refer to a *human* haircut, albeit in a borrowed sense (for example, see Iyov 1:20).

In his work *Cheshek Shlomo*, Rabbi Pappenheim takes a different approach in differentiating between *giluach* and *gizah*. There, he explains that *giluach* refers to a cut that severs the hair as close as possible to the skin from which it sprouted. This is what we would call in English “a close shave.” On the other hand, the term *gizah* refers to the act of cutting in a way that leaves some remnants of that which is cut in its place. This is what we would call in English, a way of shaving that leaves “stubble.” In fact, Rabbi Pappenheim sees the core meaning of the biliteral root GIMMEL-ZAYIN as “shaving/trimming something in a way that leaves some parts attached and some parts detached.” Other words derived from this root include: *geiz* (Psalms 72:6), the grass remaining after trimming; *gozez* (Gen. 38:12, 31:19), the act of shearing wool from sheep; *gazam*, a type of grasshopper which eats some produce and leaves over the rest; *geza*, a tree with a truncated top; and *gazit*, hewn stone (i.e. some parts of the stone are shaved down, while the rest of the stone remains intact).

Another Hebrew root related to “hair cutting” is GIMMEL-LAMMED-BET, but derivatives of this root appear only once in the Bible – thus making it a *hapax legomenon*. When G-d told the prophet Yechezkel to get a haircut, He said: “Take for yourself a sharp sword, a razor of a *galav* shall you take for yourself, and you shall pass over your head and over your beard...” (Yechezkel 5:1). Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235), also known as the Radak, explains that “a razor of a *galav*” refers to an especially sharp razor that was used by barbers to quickly cut people's hair. He thus explains that *galav* means “barber.”

The Midrash (*Bereishet Rabbah* 41:2) relates that when Pharaoh abducted Sarah, G-d sent her an

angel with a *maglev* in his hand to be at her disposal. Whenever Sarah would say “hit,” the angel would hit Pharaoh, and whenever Sarah would say “stop,” the angel would stop hitting Pharaoh. But what is a *maglev*? Rabbi Nosson of Rome (1035-1106) in *Sefer HaAruch* seems to explain that *maglev* is a bridle that was used for reining a donkey. However, Radak (to Yechezkel 5:1 and in *Sefer HaShorashim*) relates the word *maglev* to the root GIMMEL-LAMMED-BET, seemingly explaining it as a barber's razor.

The Targum known as Yonatan (to Lev. 19:27, Num. 6:19) uses variations of *galav* when rendering cognates of the Hebrew *giluach* into Aramaic, and again (to Num. 8:7) uses *galav* as a translation of the Hebrew word *ta'ar* (“razor”). Elsewhere, the Targum (to Joshua 5:2, Jer. 48:37, see also *Bereishet Rabbah* 31:8) again uses variants of *galav* in this context of razors and cutting. All of this suggests that perhaps *galav* is an Aramaic word. However, Rashi and Mahari Kara (to Yechezkel 5:1) explain that *galav* actually comes from Greek. After much searching, I have not found any Greek word which fits this description, but I did find that Dr. Alexander Kohut (1842-1894) suggests changing Rashi's wording to refer to Arabic instead of Greek. That said, Dr. Chaim Tawil notes that *galav* is clearly a loanword from the Akkadian *gallabu* (“barber”).

Other scholars connect the trilateral root GIMMEL-LAMMED-BET to similar Hebrew roots. For example, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ps. 74:6) connects this root to KUF-LAMMED-PEH (via the interchangeability of GIMMEL and KUF, and that of BET and PEH), which means “to peel” in Rabbinic Hebrew. Indeed, “haircutting” which reveals one's previously-covered epidermis can be similar to “peeling” away the skin or covering of something. Rabbi David Golumb in *Targumna* (to Num. 21:29) argues that *galav* is a metathesized form of *gvul* (“border”), which may be better understood in light of the possible connection between *sapar* and *sfar* (see below).

Speaking of the word *sapar*, although this term does not appear in the Bible, it has become the most popular term for the topic that we are discussing, because in Modern Hebrew, *sapar*

means “barber” and *tisporet* means “haircut.” But where does this word come from?

If you look closely at Targum Oneklos and Targum Yonatan, you will notice an inconsistency in how they render the Hebrew *giluach* into the Aramaic: Sometimes they translate *giluach* into *sapar*, and sometimes they simply leave the verb in its original Hebrew form as a cognate of *giluach*. Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) in *Meturgaman* notes this inconsistency and also points out that the Targumic term *maspar* for “razor” (see Targum to Num. 6:5, Judges 13:5) is also derived from this root. Interestingly, Targum Neofiti is more consistent than the other Targumim in always rendering *giluach* as *sapar*.

Cognates of *sapar* also appear in the Mishna, such as when codifying the law that the Kohanim who served in the Temple (*anshei mishmar*) or the non-Kohanim who represented the entire nation at the Temple (*anshei ma’amad*) were not allowed to get a haircut (*l’saper*) during the week they officiated, but would do so beforehand (*Taanit* 2:7). The Mishna also offers several prohibitions related to haircuts: it is forbidden to get a haircut during the week of Tisha B’Av (*Taanit* 4:7), to see a Jewish king while he is getting a haircut (*Sanhedrin* 2:5), and to get a haircut from a non-Jew under certain circumstances (*Avodah Zarah* 2:2). In all of these cases, the Mishna uses forms of the word *sapar* to refer to “haircutting.” The Mishna also uses the term *sapar* as a “barber” (*Kilayim* 9:3, *Sheviit* 8:5, *Shabbat* 1:2, *Pesachim* 4:6, *Moed Katan* 3:2, *Keilim* 13:1, 24:5), *misperet* as a “razor” (*Keilim* 13:1, 16:8), and *misparayim* as “a pair of scissors” (*Keilim* 13:1). Either way, the term *sapar* clearly entered the Jewish lexicon from the Mishna and the Targumim.

Dr. Chaim Tawil sees the etymological forebear of this term in the Neo-Babylonian word *sirpu/sirapu* (“shears,” or “scissors”), which shares the same consonants as *sapar*, although in a metathesized order. Interestingly, though, Tawil notes that this Neo-Babylonian term was used specifically for shearing *animals*, while the Hebrew/Aramaic *sapar*

was used for cutting *human hair*, cutting *animal wool*, and even cutting *vegetables* (see *Tosefta Beitza* 3:19, *Beitza* 34a, and *Keilim* 3:3). Tawil also notes that metathesis of a root’s consonants is especially prevalent when the letter REISH is involved.

Earlier we noted an inconsistency in the Targumim over whether they render the Hebrew *giluach* as *sapar* or leave it as it. Rabbi David Golomb in *Targumna* (to Lev. 14:9) attempts to reconcile this contradiction by explaining that when it comes to Joseph’s haircut in anticipation of meeting Pharaoh, Onkelos translates *giluach* as *sapar* because in Egypt they typically used “scissors” (*misparayim*) to give haircuts. But when the Torah says that a *metzora* must undergo *giluach*, Onkelos leaves the word *giluach* as is, because the law is that the *metzora* must be shaven “like a gourd” (*Sotah* 16a). This means that the *metzora* requires a very smooth and close shave – the sort of which cannot be achieved with mere scissors, but rather requires a razor. In order to accentuate that *misparayim* is not sufficient, Onkelos did not translate the *metzora*’s *giluach* into a cognate of *sapar*, as he did with Joseph’s *giluach*.

What is fascinating about the word *sapar* is how Rabbi David Golomb in *Targumna* (to Ex. 9:29, Lev. 14:9) connects it to other words that use the SAMECH-PEH-REISH string, whose core meaning he sees as “circle/round.” He asserts that all these words are related to the Greek word *sphere* (“circle”). The verb *l’saper* (“telling”) and the noun *sippur* (“story”) refer to the way that a story gets traction as people go “around and around” telling the tale to all their acquaintances. A city that sits near the border is called one that is on the *sfar*, because such cities are typically “surrounded” all around by a city wall that serves to protect them from enemy invasions. Finally, a barber is called a *sapar* because he cuts the hair on one’s head from one ear to the other in a round or circular motion.

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.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 10) — BLESSING OF REDEMPTION

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”

(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The seventh blessing reads: “Behold our affliction, take up our grievance, and redeem us speedily for Your Name’s sake, for You are a powerful redeemer. Blessed are You, Hashem, Redeemer of Israel.”

Once we have accepted upon ourselves to purify ourselves, and have asked Hashem to forgive us, we are now able to entreat Him to take us out of exile. The opening words of our blessing are paraphrased from *Tehillim* (25:18), which states, “Look upon my affliction and my toil.” Now, we are asking Hashem to see how weak we are, and how much we are suffering at the hands of others. We are telling

Hashem, and perhaps, ourselves, that we, the Jewish nation, cannot ensure our survival. Only He can.

That is why we ask Him to fight against our enemies. Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra (1090-1165) was one of the most prominent and illustrious scholars from Spain. He was truly multifaceted, publishing one of the most significant commentaries on the Torah in his era. He also wrote commentaries on *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). He authored works on Hebrew grammar, mathematics, astronomy and astrology. He was also an accomplished poet, writing many beautiful poems. In recognition of his enormous contribution to science, a crater on the moon – Abenezra – was named after him. In his

commentary on *Tehillim*, the Ibn Ezra explains that “my affliction and my toil” refers to King David’s battle against the Evil Inclination. He is describing his unceasing struggle to prevent the Evil Inclination from dragging him into sin. Rabbi Aharon Kotler was the legendary founder of the famed Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey, and the undisputed spiritual leader of the Yeshiva world in America at the time. He points out that King David is one of only three people who are granted the title of *gever*, man, in Tanach. Rabbi Kotler explains that King David earned such a remarkable title because no one fought the Evil Inclination as King David did. Just as the Evil Inclination never stops trying to trip us up, so, too, King David never gave up his battle against it.

Rabbi Baruch from Rika was still running around trying to raise money for poor families when in his eighties. His friends did their best to try getting him to slow down. But he told them, “My dear friends, you are not first to tell me to take it easy. The Evil Inclination has been telling me that for a long time! And I always told him, ‘You are much older than I am, and yet you have not retired. When you give up doing your work, I’ll give up doing mine!’”

The second part of the blessing is based on a verse in *Mishlei* (22:23), “Hashem will take up their grievances.” The commentaries explain that Hashem protects the weak against the powerful and the wealthy. In our blessing, we depict the Jewish nation as being persecuted and tormented. We anticipate the moment when Hashem will redeem us from this interminable exile. But, in the meantime, we entreat Hashem to “redeem us speedily” from the dangers and oppression that befall His Chosen nation every single day.

There is a delightful tale told about a Chassid who went to his Rebbe to ask for advice about a matter that greatly disturbed him. The Rebbe took both of his hands in his own, and while gently squeezing them he told him in Yiddish that Hashem would help – “*G-t von helfen.*” The Chassid left the Rebbe’s room feeling very relieved. Just outside the door, the

Rebbe’s young son was playing, and when he saw the Chassid, he asked him what his father had told him that caused him to look so happy. The Chassid told him that the Rebbe promised him that Hashem would help. The child looked at the Chassid and asked him if his father had told him *when* Hashem would help. The Chassid seemed confused and answered in the negative. So, the Rebbe’s young son told the Chassid to go back to his father to ask what he was supposed to do until Hashem helps him. The Chassid proceeded to do so, and when he came out again, the Rebbe’s son asked him what his father had said. The Chassid answered that the Rebbe told him that until Hashem helped... Hashem would help!

Our blessing concludes with the words, “Redeemer of Israel.” The word redeemer is written in the present because, as we await the long anticipated redemption, Hashem is constantly protecting us from the virulent hatred and derision from the other nations of the world.

Numbers are always extremely significant in Judaism and contain profound lessons. Our blessing is the seventh blessing in the *Amidah*. The Maharal (*Ner Mitzvah*) writes that the number seven represents nature and the natural cycle. For example, there are seven days in the week because Hashem created the world in seven days. The blessing for redemption being the seventh blessing teaches that however difficult any era might be, the redemption will certainly take place. It has been built into the natural cycle of world history. And, until it happens, may it be very, very soon, Hashem will always watch over us. It is fascinating to note that in our blessing we do not ask Hashem to bless us with tranquil lives, devoid of any difficulties or hardships. However perfect such a life may sound, our Sages teach that it would offer less opportunity for personal growth. The difficulties and imperfections that we encounter in life – on both an individual and national scale – help us develop and flourish in becoming productive members of the Jewish nation.

To be continued...

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE FIG TREE

The fig-tree says: “The protector of the fig tree shall eat its fruit.” (Mishlei 27:18)

The fig is a particularly fragile fruit in that each needs to be carefully picked as soon as it ripens in order to avoid infestation. This is an analogy for the study of Torah. One who wishes to truly acquire it must diligently keep to his studies daily.

Life is a quest for knowledge of Hashem and a training ground to emulate His ways. This does not take place overnight. Man is granted many decades because he needs much time to accumulate the vast wisdom of the Torah and to slowly perfect himself. The key is to “harvest” one day at a time, to safeguard its gains, and to build on more in consistent succession. Only one who dances to this tune will enjoy the fruits of his labor.

▪ Sources: Malbim

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yevamot 9-15

Separate But Equally True

“Do not make yourselves into separate groups”

The Torah states, “You are children of Hashem, your G-d. You may not cut yourselves (*lo titgodedu*)... for the dead.” (Devarim 14:1) Rashi, in his commentary on Chumash, explains the straightforward contextual meaning of the words “*lo titgodedu*” as a prohibition against a mourner cutting his own flesh due to his grief. He explains that the reason for this prohibition is so that people will not follow in the ways of the pagan nations who practiced this mourning ritual.

Rashi also explains that since we are “the children of the Hashem,” it is appropriate to be handsome and not cut ourselves when mourning, despite the fact that it is a mitzvah to mourn those who pass from this world. Commentaries elaborate on this ban against excessive mourning to be rooted in our belief of that a person’s eternal soul lives on, and that Hashem will resurrect the dead at the proper time. Therefore, mourning should be tempered with the knowledge that the degree of the enormity of the loss is only as we are able to perceive it with our physical senses, and is also only temporary.

In the course of our *sugya*, this verse is cited as the source for an additional prohibition that is derived from the exact wording of the text, as *Chazal* explain: “Do not make yourselves into separate groups.” The word *titgodedu* in the verse has the same root as the word for “group” – *agudah*.

In practical terms, what does this prohibition mean and what purpose does it serve?

First, it should be emphasized what this does *not* mean. It does not mean that there can be only one way to view and interpret various aspects of the Torah. When engaged in Torah study, it is not only permitted, but it is an admirable quality to ask, argue and “debate” with others in striving to understand the Torah in the truest possible way. Anyone who has ever even visited a yeshiva has likely been amazed by the sight and sounds of passionate Torah study between study partners and between students and their Torah teacher.

Rather, in practical terms, this prohibition bans people from dividing into separate groups which live according to separate codes of Jewish law. Of course, the details and parameters of this prohibition require careful definition, which are the subject of much discussion among our Sages in the *gemara* and through the ages. As we know, there certainly exist a variety of acceptable halachic practices, such as for Sefardic and Ashkenazic communities, and for those who dwell in Israel and those who live in the Diaspora.

What is the reason for the general prohibition against living as different groups and following more than one accepted halachic practice? Rashi’s commentary on our *daf* gives the reason as being so it should not seem like there is more than one Torah. If people follow more than one halachic ruling, a person might mistakenly think there is more than one Torah, G-d forbid. Just as the Giver of the Torah is One, so too is His Torah. Rashi’s explanation is consistent with the context and location of this verse, which is situated in a section of the Torah that addresses the tragic fate of idol worship and heresy.

However, a different reason for this prohibition is offered by the Rambam in his *Mishneh Torah*. He writes that this prohibition is meant to stem unseemly dispute and social unrest. Diverse halachic practices would likely lead to destructive disunity and confrontation. He writes: “There is a prohibition against there being two courts that follow different customs in a single city, since this can cause great strife.” (*Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 12:14*)

It appears that this derived prohibition is not a ban to forbid a practice that is inherently immoral, such as the transgressions to not murder or steal. Rather, according to both Rashi and the Rambam, the problem with dividing into various groups that follow differing halachic practices is to act as a preventative measure – preventing a descent into pagan ways and preventing strife within the Jewish People.

■ *Yevamot 13b*

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

The Torah outlines the purification for a woman after birth: for any birth, there is an initial seven day period of impurity. If the baby is a boy, on the eighth day the child is circumcised. After this eighth day, the mother waits a period 33 days – a purification cycle – until she brings her *korban* in the Beit Hamikdash. If she gives birth to a daughter, the purification period is twice as long – 66 days. The obvious question is, why the disparity?

Before we can answer this question, we turn to a general understanding of the sources of impurity, which include a dead animal (which has not been halachically slaughtered), creepy crawlers, certain bodily emissions, leprosy, and certain elements of the Temple service (e.g. leading the he-goat to the wilderness on Yom Kippur, and involvement with the ashes of the red heifer).

Man is destined to live in moral freedom. Yet, whenever a living organism succumbs to compelling physical forces, this is liable to give rise to the notion that man lacks freedom. Impurity – *tumah* – results from encounters which threaten our awareness of the moral freedom of man. There is nothing that fosters this notion more than a dead body, and it is for this reason that one who touches a dead body is rendered impure. Indeed, this resultant impurity is of the highest order and has much stringency associated with it. The purification process symbolically reaffirms moral freedom, unfettered by any external constraint.

Why would childbirth induce a state of *tumah*? The mother's effort and labor in producing a child is merely a physical process – from the “planting” phase (*taxria*) to the birth. Man is formed, takes shape and grows like a plant, in a process that has the most minimal human imprint. Although surely a woman experiences discomfort and effort in carrying and birthing a child, the process, once in motion, is markedly independent of any human choice or

input. The entire physical process by which man comes into being – similar to the physical process which ends his life – threatens the awareness of man's moral freedom. Therefore, precisely here, where man is brought into being, we are reminded that man need not succumb to the forces of nature. The mother – under the fresh impression of her passive and painful submission to the physical forces of nature which formed this child and led to the child's birth – must renew her consciousness of her moral stature.

This accounts for a single cycle of purification of 33 days – the process restores awareness of moral freedom and moral imperative. Why is it doubled in the case of a daughter?

On the day of circumcision, the father fulfills the first of the duties incumbent upon a father concerning his son. At this time the father resolves to prepare his son for the life that lies ahead: he is to train him to walk before G-d, in complete adherence to Torah, and through his own conduct serve as a role model for his son to emulate on his future path.

Following the birth of a daughter, the purity cycle is doubled – 66 days. This is meant to impress on the mother the full magnitude of her task – to be an example and role model of the Jewish woman of the future. Indeed, the mother's influence on the moral standards of her daughters is twice as great as her influence on the moral development of her sons. A crucial part of her sons' education comes from the father, as he becomes the male role model for them. With daughters, however, the mother is both a role model and a molder of character. Hence, after the birth of each daughter she must doubly prepare herself – for her own sake and for her daughter's sake – to fully embrace the moral freedom granted her, and ascend the path of purity.

- Sources: Commentary, *Vayikra* 7:19-21, 12:2, 4-5