**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT TAZRIA**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Tazria outlines the basic laws of *tzara’at* skin infections that render a person *tamei* (ritually impure). This section begins with a discussion of the various forms of *tzara’at* that surface on a person’s skin, and then addresses the forms of *tzara’at* that surface in the hair of one’s head and one’s beard (13:29-37). Different guidelines apply when an infection appears in one’s hair, as opposed to the skin. For example, according to most *Rishonim* (including the Rambam, *Hilkhot Tum’at Tzara’at* 8:1; Ramban, Vayikra 13:29), the form of *tzara’at* that surfaces in the hair does not necessarily involve any discoloration. Rather, it manifests itself in the mysterious loss of hair, and the individual is considered *tamei* if the hairless area spreads, or if a yellow hair grows in the hairless spot. This is in contrast to skin *tzara’at*, which is a discoloration in the skin that either spreads or changes the color of the hair on the skin to white.

An interesting question arises as to the status of the eyebrows in this regard. Are eyebrows considered the same as the hair on the head and beard, or like the rest of the body?

The *Chazon Ish* (Taharot, *hosafot*, p. 296) notes that the Gemara appears to indicate that the eyebrows have the same status as the hair of one’s head and beard with regard to *tzara’at*. In Masekhet Menachot (37b), the Gemara establishes that although the Torah requires wearing *tefillin* “*bein einekha*” (“in between your eyes” – Shemot 13:9 and elsewhere), this actually means that the *tefillin* should be worn on top of the head, parallel to the area in between the eyes. Rabbi Yehuda, as the Gemara cites, reaches this conclusion by comparing the two *tefillin* which are worn – the *tefillin shel rosh*, worn on the head, and the *tefillin shel yad*, which we wear on our arm. Just as the *tefillin shel yad* is worn on a place which is susceptible to only one form of *tzara’at*, Rabbi Yehuda said, the *tefillin shel rosh* must likewise be worn on a place of the body where only one form of *tzara’at* applies. If the *tefillin* would be worn between the eyes, then inevitably, part of the *tefillin* would be situated on skin, and part would be situated on the hair of the eyebrows. As such, Rabbi Yehuda notes, part of the *tefillin* would rest on a place where *tzara’at* is manifest via a white hair (on the skin), and part on a place where *tzara’at* is manifest via a yellow hair (the eyebrows). Necessarily, then, the phrase “*bein einekha*” cannot be taken literally, and the *tefillin shel rosh* is worn on the head, and not in between the eyes.

The clear implication of Rabbi Yehuda’s comment is that the eyebrows are treated like the hair in the head or beard with regard to *tzara’at*, such that a *tzara’at* infection is manifest in the eyebrows the same way it is in the hair and beard, and not the way it is on other parts of the body.

However, the *Chazon Ish* dismisses this conclusion, noting that in no other source is there any mention of the eyebrows being treated like the hair on one’s head and beard with regard to *tzara’at*. Undoubtedly, the *Chazon Ish* argues, the eyebrows are no different from other areas of the body where hair naturally grows, regarding which the special laws relevant to the hair of the head and beard do not apply. The *Chazon Ish* therefore explains the Gemara to mean simply that skin and hair are two separate bodily entities, and *tefillin* is to be worn on a single entity. The difference between skin and hair noted by the Gemara – that *tzara’at* is manifest on skin in the form of a white hair, and in hair in the form of a yellow hair – is not a halakhic difference, but rather a factual difference. Meaning, the fact that *tzara’at* manifests itself one way on skin and another way in hair reflects the fact that they constitute entirely different entities, such that *tefillin* cannot be worn on both skin and hair. This is not to say, though, that the eyebrows themselves are treated like the hair on the head and the beard.

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted that the Torah in Parashat Tazria draws a distinction between the hair on the head and beard, and the rest of the body, with regard to the laws of *tzara’at*, presenting unique guidelines for establishing the manifestation of *tzara’at* in one’s hair. We also discussed the Gemara’s comments in Masekhet Menachot (37b) which appear to imply that the eyebrows are included in the special laws applying to the hair of the head and beard. The Gemara there discusses the requirement to wear the *tefillin shel rosh* on the head, and not “in between the eyes” as the Torah appears to require, and the Gemara cites Rabbi Yehuda as reaching this conclusion based on a line of reasoning related to *tzara’at*: just as the *tefillin shel yad* is worn on the arm, which is susceptible to only one type of *tzara’at*, the *tefillin shel rosh* must likewise be worn on a place susceptible to only one type of *tzara’at*. As Rashi explains, if the *tefillin shel rosh* were worn between the eyes, part of it would be on the eyebrows, and the *tefillin* thus would be worn on places that are susceptible to two different manifestations of *tzara’at*. The Rashash notes that the Gemara’s comments appear to prove that the eyebrows have the same status as the hair on the head and beard with respect to *tzara’at*. Yesterday, we saw that the *Chazon Ish* dismissed this conclusion, and interpreted the Gemara’s comments differently.

This question is addressed also by Malbim, in his Torah commentary (to Shemot 13:9), where he notes a passage in the Tosefta (cited in the Rash Mi-Shantz’s commentary to Negaim 10:9) delineating the precise boundaries of the “head” and “beard” with respect to the laws of *tzara’at*. It stands to reason that had the eyebrows been included as part of the hair of the head for the purposes of these *halakhot*, the Tosefta would have mentioned them in this context. The absence of such mention would certainly appear to indicate that they are not included, and thus the guidelines applicable to eyebrows are those which apply to the rest of the body, and not those relevant to the hair of the head and beard.

Malbim therefore suggests a different explanation of the Gemara’s comment regarding the *tefillin shel rosh*, whereby it does not speak of the eyebrows at all. He explains the Gemara to mean that if the *tefillin* were worn in between the eyes, on the forehead, then it would be worn on a part of the body – the head – that has different halakhic areas: the top of the head, where hair normally grows, is treated one way in regard to *tzara’at*, whereas the forehead – where hair does not grow – is treated a different way. Rabbi Yehuda felt that just as the *tefillin shel yad* is worn on the arm, the entirety of which has a single halakhic status, the *tefillin shel rosh* must likewise be worn on a part of the body that has but a single halakhic status. We can therefore conclude that it is worn on the part of the head where hair grows, all of which is halakhically treated equally. (One could, seemingly, question Malbim’s explanation, as if we view the forehead as part of the head, then even by wearing the *tefillin* on the top of the head, it is worn on a part of the body with two different halakhic regions.)

On this basis, Malbim suggests associating this remark of Rabbi Yehuda with his ruling in the Mishna in Masekhet Negaim (10:10) regarding the case of a bald individual who develops a *tzara’at* infection on his head. The Torah in Parashat Tazria (13:42) establishes that once a person loses all the hair on his head, the skin on the head is treated like the skin on the rest of his body with respect to *tzara’at*, and the Torah emphasizes that this applies whether a discoloration surfaces on his “*karachat*” (back of the head) or “*gabachat*” (front part of the head). According to the majority view among the *Tanna’im*, this emphasis was made in order to delineate the “*karachat*” and “*gabachat*” as two distinct halakhic regions. Meaning, if a discoloration smaller than the minimum size of a *tzara’at* infection (a *geris*) surfaces on one area, and a second small discoloration on the other area, they do not combine to render the individual impure, as these are two distinct halakhic regions. Rabbi Yehuda, however, disagrees, and maintains that both areas of the head are to be viewed as a single halakhic region with respect to *tzara’at*, unless a line of hair separates them. Malbim suggests that Rabbi Yehuda’s ruling there in the Mishna is directly linked to his inference in Masekhet Menachot regarding the *tefillin shel rosh*. According to the majority view among the *Tanna’im*, even disregarding the forehead, *Halakha* separates the head into two separate regions, and thus the *tefillin shel rosh* necessarily differs in this respect from the *tefillin shel yad*. As such, Rabbi Yehuda’s inference – as Malbim understands it – is possible only according to his own ruling in Masekhet Negaim, whereby the back and front of the head are viewed as a single halakhic entity.

Monday

In our last two installments, we noted the Gemara’s implication in Masekhet Menachot (37b) that the eyebrows are treated just like the hair of the head and the beard with regard to *tzara’at*. The symptoms that render a person a *metzora* – somebody stricken with *tzara’at* and thus considered ritually impure – are different on the hair of the head and beard than on the rest of the body. The Gemara seems to imply, though, that the eyebrows are halakhically equivalent to the hair of the head and beard in this regard. As we saw, both Malbim (to Shemot 13:9) and the *Chazon Ish* (Taharot, *hosafot*, p. 296) dismiss this conclusion, and suggest alternative readings of the Gemara.

By contrast, the Rashash (commentary to Masekhet Menachot) and the Rogatchover Gaon (*Tozfnat Panei’ach*, Vayikra 13:29), indeed conclude that the eyebrows – as well as other areas of hair on the body, such as pubic hair – are indeed treated the same as the hair of the head and beard with respect to *tzara’at*. These writers note that this conclusion appears to emerge not only from the Gemara’s discussion in Masekhet Menachot, but also from a passage in *Torat Kohanim*, commenting to the Torah’s introduction to the section of laws regarding *tzara’at* infections in the hair of the head and beard (Vayikra 13:29). *Torat Kohanim* infers from the Torah’s formulation that a person becomes a *metzora* if he has a manifestation of *tzara’at* either in the hair of his head, or in the hair of his beard. Lest one think that the status of *metzora* requires infections on both the hair of the head and the hair of the beard, *Torat Kohanim* deduces from a subtle nuance in the text that an infection in either area suffices to render a person a *metzora*. In making this point, *Torat Kohanim* adds that one becomes a *metzora* even in a case of “*lo ba-rosh ve-lo ba-zakan*” – if there is no infection on either the hair of the head or the head of the beard. Both the *Korban Aharon* commentary to *Torat Kohanim*, as well as the Vilna Gaon, in his notes to *Torat Kohanim*, assert that this phrase is the result of a printing error, as it appears unintelligible. If there is no infection on either the hair of the head or the hair of the beard, then the individual has no reason to be considered a *metzora*.

However, both the Rashash and the Rogatchover Gaon suggest accepting this text, explaining that it refers to areas of hair on the body other than the head and beard. According to these writers, *Torat Kohanim*’s intent is to extend the Torah discussion of *tzara’at* on the hair of the head and beard to other places of hair on the body – as indicated by the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Menachot concerning the eyebrows.

A third position is taken by the *Tiferet Yisrael* commentary to the Mishna (*Mareh Kohen*, 8), who distinguishes between the eyebrows and other areas of hair on the body. The eyebrows, he writes, are included in the laws of *tzara’at* that govern the hair of head and heard, because they, too, are situated on the head, and the Torah speaks of this manifestation of *tzara’at* as occurring on “the head” or the beard. Other areas of hair, however, would not be included.

In conclusion, it has been noted that a verse later in Sefer Vayikra (14:9) appears to prove that the eyebrows are not included as part of the hair on the head and beard. The Torah there describes the procedure required of a person stricken with *tzara’at* after he is cured in order to regain his status of purity, and this procedure includes the removal of all the hair on his body: “…he shall shave all his hair – his head, his beard and his eyebrows, and he shall shave all his hair.” The fact that the Torah found it necessary to specify the eyebrows even after mentioning the hair on the head and the beard would certainly seem to suggest that the eyebrows are not included in the hair of the head. (However, the Rashash and Rogatchover Gaon could contend that this is precisely why *Torat Kohanim* needed to make a special inference from the text to include the eyebrows in the laws of *tzara’at* governing the hair of the head.)

Tuesday

Parashat Tazria begins with the laws relevant to a woman’s status of *tum’a* (impurity) after childbirth, and in the midst of this discussion the Torah reiterates the command of *berit mila*, to circumcise a male child on his eighth day of life (12:3).

The Gemara in Masekhet Menachot (43b) famously cites in reference to the *mitzva* of *berit mila* the verse in Sefer Tehillim (119:162) in which King David exclaims, “*Sas anokhi al imratekha ke-motzei shalal rav*” – “I am elated over Your pronouncements, like one who finds a great treasure.” David made his proclamation, the Gemara explains, when he was bathing, after reflecting upon the fact that he could not perform any *mitzvot* at that moment, and then remembering that he was circumcised. Upon recognizing that even then, while bathing, he was, in some sense, observing a *mitzva*, he jubilantly exclaimed, “I am elated over Your pronouncements, like one who finds a great treasure” – comparing the joy of *berit mila* to the joy of chancing upon a treasure.

Rav Sar Shalom of Belz (the first Belzer Rebbe) cites those who explain the Gemara’s analogy between *berit mila* to a treasure by noting the most basic difference between the conventional way of acquiring money and finding a treasure. Normally, of course, we obtain money only through hard work and effort. A “treasure,” a sudden windfall that comes effortlessly and unexpectedly, marks the very rare exception to the rule. The same is true of spiritual “wealth.” Proper observance of a *mitzva* requires time, thought and effort. We cannot hope to achieve high spiritual standards without investing work, just as we cannot hope to achieve material success without investing work. *Berit mila*, however, marks the exception. In all but very rare cases, nobody invested any effort to be circumcised. The effort is made by a person’s parents, before he was old enough to be able to make any decisions on his own. What King David realized was not merely that the *mitzva* of *berit mila* is something he fulfilled at all times, even while bathing – but also that it is a *mitzva* with which he was credited without any investment of effort. *Berit mila*, in this sense, is “*shalal rav*” – a great treasure, something precious that a person receives without having to work for it.

Developing this point further, *berit mila* symbolically represents the spiritual foundation which parents are obliged to provide for their children. Regardless of how we have been raised, we cannot expect to achieve without investing work and effort. Even those who received the highest quality religious education, and who were raised in the most devout families, must still work hard to succeed in Torah observance throughout their adult lives. Nevertheless, the *mitzva* of *berit mila* represents the “*shalal*” which parents must bequeath to their children – the foundation of spiritual “wealth” that parents are to provide their children to enable them to build a life of Torah commitment. Although the children must themselves make a conscious decision to live this life, and make the effort and sacrifices that such a life requires, nevertheless, the parents must grant them a “*shalal*” – a supply of knowledge, guidance, experience and inspiration which the children did not do anything to receive, but will facilitate their spiritual achievement throughout their lives. Most of what the children will accomplish will be through their own work – but the parents must provide the “treasure” that will help assure the success of their efforts.

Wednesday

At one point in the Torah’s discussion of *tzara’at* in Parashat Tazria, it speaks of a person determined to have *tzara’at* as an “*ish tzarua*” (literally, “a leprous man” – 13:44). The Gemara in Masekhet Arakhin (3a) notes that the use of the term “*ish*” (“man,” as opposed to “boy”) in this context should, seemingly, indicate that the status of *tzara’at* is limited to adults. At first glance, then, we should conclude that a minor does not attain the status of impurity associated with *tzara’at*. However, the Gemara dismisses this conclusion, noting that in the Torah’s introduction to the section dealing with *tzara’at*, it speaks of an “*adam*” (“person”) who is stricken with *tzara’at*, and the word “*adam*” refers to both young and old alike. (Rashi, commenting to the Gemara’s parallel discussion in Masekhet Nidda 44a, explains that the term “*adam*” is used in reference to young girls in Sefer Bamidbar 31:35.) To explain the implication of the term “*ish tzarua*,” the Gemara asserts that this term is used to instruct that the law established in the next verse, requiring a *metzora* to rend his garments and let his hair grow, applies only to males stricken with *tzara’at*, and not females. The term “*ish*” is used in order to exclude women from this aspect of *tzara’at*, but not to exclude minors from the laws of *tzara’at* (or women from the other laws of *tzara’at*).

The *Midrash Ha-gadol* makes a different inference from the word “*adam*” used in the Torah’s introduction to the subject of *tzara’at*, commenting that this word is used in order to exclude gentiles from the laws of *tzara’at*. As the Mishna states in Masekhet Negaim (3:1), gentiles do not obtain a status of impurity even if they exhibit the symptoms of *tzara’at*, and the *Midrash Ha-gadol* infers this exclusion from the use of the word “*adam*” in the Torah’s discussion of *tzara’at*. The *Midrash Ha-gadol* here appears to follow the famous ruling of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (Yevamot 61a) that the word “*adam*” used in the context of *tum’at ohel* – the status of impurity resulting from being under the same roof as a human corpse – applies only to Jewish corpses. The Torah (Bamidbar 19:14) establishes the law of *tum’at ohel* in regard to a case of “*adam ki yamut be-ohel*” (“a person who dies in a tent”), and Rabbi Shimon understood that the word “*adam*” refers specifically to a Jew, such that only a Jewish corpse brings *tum’a* to people and utensils under the same roof. The *Midrash Ha-gadol*, too, seems to have understood that the word “*adam*” refers specifically to Jews, and thus infers from the use of the word in the context of *tzara’at* that the status of impurity resulting from *tzara’at* applies only to Jews.

Rav Shlomo Gantzfried, in his work *Apiryon*, finds it significant that the Torah emphasizes this point – that the status of *tzara’at* is applicable only to Jews. The Gemara in Masekhet Arakhin (16b) famously teaches that *tzara’at* would befall those who indulged in *lashon ha-ra* – gossip, talebearing and slander. *Am Yisrael*’s special mission, Rav Gantzfried writes, makes such conduct especially grievous, thus warranting the harsh punishment of *tzara’at*. The term “*adam*” points to the fact that we must all see one another as our kin, and thus strive for peace and unity. The high standards expected of God’s special nation simply do not allow for petty strife and one-upmanship. We are to see our fellow Jews are members of our “team,” not as opponents. The status of *Am Yisrael* demands that we work together, that we disagree respectfully, that we think and speak positively of one another, that we avoid unnecessary infighting and small minded quarreling, and that we support rather than malign each other. The concept of *tzara’at* was established specifically because we are “*adam*” – we have been charged with the mission to represent a higher moral and spiritual standard, one which does not tolerate indulgence in gossip.

Thursday

Yesterday, we noted that the Torah introduces the subject of *tzara’at* by speaking of an “*adam*” (“person”) who has a white discoloration on his skin (13:2). As we saw, the Gemara and Midrash make different inferences from the use of this word in reference to *tzara’at*.

The use of this word is discussed also by Netziv, in his *Ha’ameik Davar* commentary, where he cites the *Zohar* as interpreting the word “*adam*” as referring specifically to the spiritual elite, to the nation’s Torah scholars. According to the *Zohar*, it was, ironically, only the righteous members of the nation who would be stricken with *tzara’at*. The reason, the *Zohar* explains, is that due to their exalted spiritual level, God provided a system through which they could earn atonement for their misdeeds – the affliction of *tzara’at* and the strict laws that apply to the afflicted individual. Most people were not given this opportunity for atonement, and thus the affliction of *tzara’at* was reserved specifically for the nation’s spiritual elite.

After discussing the *Zohar*’s comments, Netziv offers a different reason for why *tzara’at* would befall specifically the nation’s scholars. *Chazal* (Arakhin 16b) famously viewed *tzara’at* as a punishment for *lashon ha-ra* (gossip and talebearing), but Netziv suggests distinguishing in this regard between the illness itself, and the humiliating halakhic consequences of *tzara’at*. The medical condition of *tzara’at* would be suffered as a punishment for *lashon ha-ra*, but the halakhic consequences – the state of impurity, being quarantined, and rending one’s garments – were a punishment for the *chilul Hashem* (defamation of God) resulting from one’s inappropriate speech. Accordingly, Netziv boldly asserts, whereas general skin disorders would afflict anybody who indulged in *lashon ha-ra*, halakhic *tzara’at* would afflict specifically the Torah scholars. When an “*adam*,” a person of acknowledged spiritual stature, indulges in gossip or regularly makes disparaging remarks about people, he not only violates the Torah’s code of appropriate speech, but also brings shame to God and to the Torah, both of which he represents. As such, he must suffer not only the physical discomfort of *tzara’at*, but also the humiliation of being expelled from his city and appearing unkempt.

Torah scholars are expected to adhere to especially high standards of interpersonal conduct, and their violation of the Torah’s interpersonal laws is considered an especially grievous offense. Those who have acquired knowledge and proficiency in Torah are expected to be more refined, more compassionate, more dignified, and more respectful of other people, including those who have not achieved their level of scholarship of observance. As the representatives of Torah, they are to serve as living examples of how “its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peaceful” (Mishlei 3:17), how Torah life is characterized by amicable, courteous relations between people, and not by negativity or arrogance. Torah excellence must lead us to be more respectful and more refined in our dealings with other people, and anything less is considered a grave *chilul Hashem*.

Friday

Parashat Tazria introduces the guidelines for determining bodily *tzara’at* – the manifestations of *tzara’at* on a person’s body. We find among the laws of *tzara’at* one surprising and counterintuitive detail – that if the discoloration appears on a person’s entire body, he is not considered a *metzora* (a person stricken with *tzara’at*), and he does not attain the status of impurity associated with *tzara’at* (13:13). A person becomes a *metzora* if one spot or area on his body is discolored in a manner which meets the qualifications of *tzara’at*, but if his entire body is discolored in this fashion, he is not a *metzora*. Different approaches have been taken by the commentators to explain this seemingly peculiar anomaly.

Rav Yitzchak Karo (uncle of Rav Yosef Karo, author of the *Shulchan Arukh*), in his *Toldot Yitzchak* commentary, suggests an explanation based on the famous tradition viewing *tzara’at* as a punishment for the sin of *lashon ha-ra* – disparaging speech about other people. People generally speak *lashon ha-ra*, Rav Karo writes, for one of two reasons. Some spread negative information about other people with the specific intention of damaging their reputation, to make them disliked. Rav Karo explains that such forms of *lashon ha-ra* would be punished by standard *tzara’at*, which requires the *metzora* to live in isolation outside his city. As he strove to cause people to live “alone,” scorned and rejected by their peers, he is forced to live in isolation.

Many times, however, people spread negative information about others not with the intention to cause harm, but in the hopes of boosting their own social standing. Speaking disparagingly about others tends to attract attention, as people are naturally eager to hear about their peers’ faults and failings. And so it is common for people to spread rumors, disclose embarrassing information, and poke fun at others not to hurt other people’s reputation, but for the sake of their own social stature, to draw attention to themselves. This form of *lashon ha-ra*, Rav Karo suggests, would be punished through a *tzara’at* infection that covered the individual’s entire body. Such a person specifically would not be determined impure and thus quarantined, and would instead remain in his city – drawing attention to himself by his unusual color. As he sought to be the center of attention by bringing shame to others, he would become the center of attention through his own humiliation, by looking unusual. Rather than being isolated, this person would live among his usual circle of friends – those whose admiration and approval he so desperately sought – and he would be embarrassed to show his face, as a punishment for trying to be the center of their attention at other people’s expense.

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