

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT TAZRIA

DVAR TORAH: PEOPLE FOLLOW THE ANIMALS

Parshat Tazria's laws about people – impurity of childbirth and tzara'at-leprosy – follow Parshat Shemini's laws about kosher and non-kosher animals. Rashi explains the order by quoting Rabbi Simlai (Vayikra Rabbah 14:1): "Just as in creation Man followed the animals, so his 'Torah' follows that of the animals." That just begs the question: Why did Man's creation follow the creation of the animals? That question is answered by the Gemara (Sanhedrin 38a), that offers four answers. Harav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher, זצ"ל (1928-2003, Yerushalayim) suggests a fifth (Even Yisrael on Tazria).

Why was man created after the animals? Each of the animals has a special quality, a special power or גִּדּוּהַ. The Gemara says (Eiruvin 100b) that if we had not been given the Torah, we would still have been able to learn modesty from the cat, respect for property from the ant, and monogamy from the dove. These seem to be examples; we could learn similar lessons from the rest of G-d's creatures. Man was created after the animals, says Rav Fisher, because man contains within him all of the good qualities of all of the animals. Chazal expressed this in a Midrash (Avot D'Rabbi Natan 31:3): "The Holy One, blessed be He, whose great Name will be blessed forever and ever, created the entire world, the Heavens and the earth, the upper and lower worlds. Everything that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in the world, He created within Man."

But man has one additional quality the animals do not: free will. Man can direct all of his traits towards good, or, G-d forbid, the opposite. If a man uses his free will improperly he is then opened up to צָרַעַת, a special Divine message that he has strayed from goodness. Rav Fisher's answer sheds light on two of the Gemara's answers (Sanhedrin 38a) to the question, "Why was man created on the afternoon of the sixth day, right before Shabbat?" One answer is that If man gets arrogant he is told, "The mosquito was created before you." Man who misuses his free will sinks below the animals and becomes a candidate for tzara'at. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 7:5) lists eleven sins and character flaws that bring about tzara'at; that list includes arrogance.

Arrogance brought about tzara'at for Naaman, the conceited Aramean general. Even after travelling all the way to the Land of Israel to get cured of tzara'at by the prophet Elisha, and even after Elisha's messenger told him to immerse in the Yarden River, Naaman's arrogance didn't allow him to take the suggestion seriously. He expected Elisha himself to go out to meet him. He expected a prophetic calling out in the Name of G-d followed by a mystical move of Elisha's prophetic hand – all fitting for a person of Naaman's stature. Instead, Elisha sent a messenger and told him to immerse in the Yarden. Naaman scorned: "Amanah and Parpar, the rivers of Damascus, are better than all of the waters of Israel!" His cure came about only when he was able to humble himself by listening to his servants, following Elisha's instructions, and immersing in the minor river.

But man who takes all of the animals' qualities, and uses his free will to harness them for goodness, soars above creation. For that man, two of the Gemara's other answers apply: Hashem created man immediately before Shabbat so his very first experience would be the mitzvah of Shabbat. Hashem is also likened to a king who built a palace, perfected it, and prepared an elaborate banquet for an honored guest. When the guest arrives, everything is ready and the feast begins. Man is Hashem's honored guest and the world is the banquet. The rest of creation was just a preparation for Man. Man followed and was invited to the Divine banquet, Shabbat.

SOURCE GUIDE: GEICHAZI GETS NAAMAN'S TZARA'AT

The Tanach records how Geichazi, Elisha's attendant, was cursed to be a metzora-leper until the day of his death. When Elisha tells him of his punishment, he says, "Naaman's tzara'at-leprosy will cling to you." Naaman was the Aramean general who came to Israel and was cured of tzara'at when he followed Elisha's instructions and immersed himself in the Yarden River. Why, though, was Geichazi's tzara'at referred to as Naaman's?

A. Geichazi's Tzara'at

Naaman came from Aram to be cured of his tzara'at, and was ready to pay for it with a large sum of silver, gold, and clothing. After being cured through immersing seven times in the Jordan, he offers the tribute to Elisha the prophet, who refuses any gift at all. We read about Naaman's cure in the standard haftarah for Parshat Tazria, and the Geichazi episode immediately follows:

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| <p>1. II Melachim 5:20-27</p> <p>(20) And Geichazi, the servant of Elisha the man of G-d, said (to himself), "Here my master has stopped Naaman, this Aramean, from giving, by not taking from his hand what he brought. As Hashem lives, I will run after him and take something from him."</p> <p>(21) And Geichazi chased after Naaman; and Naaman saw him running after him, and he leaned over off the chariot toward him, and said, "Is all well?"</p> <p>(22) And he said, "All is well. My master sent me, saying, 'Here, just now two youths have come to me from Mt. Ephraim, of the disciples of the prophets. Please give them a talent of silver and two suits of clothing.'</p> <p>(23) And Naaman said, "Please take two talents. And he urged him and he tied two talents of silver in two pockets, and two suits of clothing. And he gave his two servants, and they carried them before him.</p> <p>(24) And he came to a secret place, and he took [them] from their hands, and he deposited them in the house. And he dismissed the men, and they went away.</p> <p>(25) And he came and stood before his master, and Elisha said to him, "Where are you coming from, Geichazi?" And he said, "Your servant has gone neither here nor there."</p> <p>(26) And he said to him, "Did my heart not go (along with you) when a man turned around off his chariot toward you? Is it time to take the silver, and to buy clothing and olive trees and vineyards and sheep and cattle and slaves and maidservants?</p> <p>(27) Now Naaman's tzara'at shall cling to you and to your children forever." And he went away from before him, stricken with tzara'at, [white] as snow.</p> | <p style="text-align: right;">מלכים ב' ה:כ-כז</p> <p>(כ) וַיֹּאמֶר גֵּיחָזִי נַעַר אֱלִישָׁע אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה חָשַׁף אֲדָנָי אֶת נַעֲמָן הָאַרְמִי הַזֶּה מִקַּחַת מִיָּדוֹ אֶת אֲשֶׁר הֵבִיא חֵי ה' כִּי אִם רִצְתִי אֲחֲרָיו וְלִקְחֹתִי מֵאִתּוֹ מֵאוֹמָה.</p> <p>(כא) וַיִּרְדֹּף גֵּיחָזִי אַחֲרָיו נַעֲמָן וַיִּרְאֶה נַעֲמָן רֵץ אַחֲרָיו וַיִּפֹּל מֵעַל הַמָּרְכָבָה לִקְרֹאתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְּׁלוֹם.</p> <p>(כב) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלוֹם אֲדָנָי שְׁלַחְנִי לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה עֲתָה זֶה בָּאוּ אֵלַי שְׁנֵי נְעָרִים מִהַר אֶפְרַיִם מִבְּנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים תְּנֶה נָא לָהֶם כֶּסֶף כֶּסֶף וְשָׂמִי חֲלָפוֹת בְּגָדִים.</p> <p>(כג) וַיֹּאמֶר נַעֲמָן הוֹאֵל קַח כֶּכָּרִים וַיִּפְרֹץ בּוֹ וַיִּצַר כֶּכָּרִים כֶּסֶף בְּשְׁנֵי חֲרָטִים וְשָׂמִי חֲלָפוֹת בְּגָדִים וַיִּתֵּן אֵל שְׁנֵי נְעָרָיו וַיִּשְׂאוּ לִפְנָיו.</p> <p>(כד) וַיָּבֵא אֵל הַעֲפָל וַיִּקַּח מִיָּדָם וַיִּפְקֹד בְּבֵית וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ.</p> <p>(כה) וְהוּא בָּא וַיַּעֲמֵד אֵל אֲדָנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֱלִישָׁע מֵאִן גָּחִזִי וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא הֵלֵךְ עַבְדְּךָ אֲנִי וְאֵנָּה.</p> <p>(כו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לֹא לְבִי הֵלֵךְ כַּאֲשֶׁר הִפֵּךְ אִישׁ מֵעַל מָרְכָבָתוֹ לִקְרֹאתְךָ הַעֵת לִקְחַת אֶת הַכֶּסֶף וְלִקְחַת בְּגָדִים וְזֵיתִים וַיְכַרְמִים וַיִּצְאֵן וַיִּבְקֹר וַיַּעֲבִדִים וַיִּשְׁפָּחוֹת.</p> <p>(כז) וַיִּצְרַעַת נַעֲמָן תִּדְבַק בְּךָ וּבְיָרְעֶךָ לְעוֹלָם וַיִּצָּא מִלִּפְנֵיו מִצְרַע כַּשָּׁלֵג.</p> |
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Why was Geichazi punished with tzara'at, and why did Elisha say that he would get "Naaman's tzara'at"?

B. Naaman's Tzara'at

One possible answer is that the same character flaw that brought about Naaman's tzara'at brought about Geichazi's. What, though, was the source of Naaman's tzara'at? One midrash says it was arrogance:

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| <p>2. Bamidbar Rabbah 7:5 [Tzara'at comes about] because of arrogance – This refers to Naaman, as it says, “[Naaman the general of the king of Aram] was a great man” (II Melachim 5:1). What is the meaning of “great” here? It means that he was arrogant because he was a mighty warrior. Through that he became a leper.</p> | <p>במדבר רבה ז:ה ... ועל גסות הרוח – זה נעמן, שנאמר, “[ונעמן שר צבא מלך ארם] היה איש גדול” (מלכים ב ה:א). מהו “גדול”? שהיתה רוחו גסה מפני שהיה גבור חיל ועל ידי כך נצטרע.</p> |
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Another midrash ties Naaman’s tzara’at to taking a Jewish girl captive in the war:

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| <p>3. Midrash Tanchuma Tazria Chapter 11 Do not be surprised [by prophecies of tzara’at for the enemies of Israel in the end of days], for in this world the Holy One, blessed be He, punished Israel’s enemies exceedingly and smote them with tzara’at. Who does this refer to? It refers to Naaman, for it says, “Naaman, the general of the king of Aram was a great man before his master ... and the man was a mighty warrior, a metzora. Why did he get tzara’at? It was because he took a young girl from the Land of Israel captive.</p> | <p>מדרש תנחומא תזריע פרק יא ואל תתמה שהרי בעולם הזה פרע הקב"ה משונאיהם של ישראל הרבה והכה אותם בצרעת ומי היה זה נעמן שנא' (מ"ב ח) ונעמן שר צבא מלך ארם היה איש גדול לפני אדניו וגו' והאיש גבור חיל מצורע בשביל מה נצטרע בשביל ששבה מארץ ישראל נערה קטנה.</p> |
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Harav Yehudah Leib Ginsberg, זצ"ל, (1888–1946, first a rov in Russia, then in Denver, Colorado), the author of Musar Haneviim, connects this with another midrash about the causes for tzara’at:

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| <p>4. Bamidbar Rabbah 7:5 [Tzara’at comes about] for one who enters a realm that is not his – This refers to Uziahu, who [even though he was a king from the house of David] wanted to enter the realm of Kehunah, priesthood. What is written concerning him? “Tzara’at shone on his forehead” (Divrei Hayaimim II 26:19).</p> | <p>במדבר רבה ז:ה ... ועל הנכנס בתחום שאינו שלו – זה עזיהו, שביקש להכנס בתחום הכהונה. ומה כתיב בו? “והצרעת זרחה במצחו” (ד"ה ב כו:ט)</p> |
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When Naaman took a Jewish girl captive he encroached on the realm of the People of Israel. Geichazi likewise took Naaman’s money and moved into a realm that was not his. Geichazi also took an oath (!) to go against Elisha’s clear policy of not taking any money at all from Naaman. If Geichazi had not taken the money, the Naaman episode would have brought about a complete sanctification of the Divine Name. Instead, Geichazi went against his master Elisha, and had the audacity to lie to him about it. Geichazi got Naaman’s tzara’at because he shared the causes of Naaman’s tzara’at.

C. A Tzara’at Exchange

The following midrash takes a different direction about why Geichazi got Naaman’s tzara’at:

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| <p>5. Midrash Tanchuma Metzora Chapter 1 ... Geichazi was attending to Elisha, and saw the silver, gold, and clothing. He said, “Behold, my master has held back from taking from the hand of Naaman this Aramean what he brought. By the life of G-d (this is an oath) if I do not run after him and take something from him” (II Melachim 5:20). Certainly he took his (Naaman’s) blemish (the word מאומה, something, is written without an ך, and is read by the midrash as מום, blemish). For it says, “Naaman’s tzara’at will cling to you and your children forever. He left from before him with tzara’at as white as snow” (II Melachim 5:27). Why? Because it is written, “Nothing (מאומה) should cling to you from the forbidden things” (Devarim 13:18). The king of Aram and Naaman his general were idol worshippers, and it is written, “Do not bring an abomination into your home” (Devarim 7:26).</p> | <p>מדרש תנחומא מצורע פרק א' ... היה גחזי משמש לפני אלישע ראה את הכסף ואת הזהב ואת הבגדים אמר הנה חשך אדני את נעמן הארמי הזה מקחת מידו את אשר הביא חי ה' כי אם רצתי אחריו ולקחתי מאתו מאומה (מלכים ב ה) בודאי מומו לקח שנאמר (שם) וצרעת נעמן תדבק בך ובזרעך לעולם ויצא מלפניו מצורע כשלג למה לפי שכתוב (דברים ו) ולא ידבק בידך מאומה מן החרם והיה מלך ארם ונעמן שר צבאו עובדי ע"ג וכתוב ולא תביא תועבה אל ביתך.</p> |
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Naaman's tzara'at was actually transferred to Geichazi. For clinging to the abominable possessions of the idolatrous king of Aram and his general, the blemish clung to him.

THE POWER OF INNOVATION BY RABBI MENDEL FARBER

This week we read Parshat Hachodesh. There are two cycles of time, the solar cycle and the lunar cycle. The solar cycle is called the שנה and the lunar cycle called the חודש. The root of the word שנה is שני, or second; it means repetition. It is a cycle within which things age. Each cycle is a repetition of the previous one. With each cycle everything is a year older. The lunar cycle is called חודש because the moon disappears every month and then reappears anew. That is why it is called חודש from the word חידוש, new. Each month is not a repetition of the previous one. It is something new – not a rebirth but, rather, a new birth.

The first mitzvah of the Torah is the mitzvah of declaring Rosh Chodesh. The beginning contains everything that follows. If the Torah begins with the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh that means that the Torah, in a global sense, is meant to create a חידוש, to innovate. Let me try to explain. The first innovation in the world, the first chiddush, was the sin of Adam, when he ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. An extremely radical change was innovated in existence. The world became a place very different from what it was intended to be. The human lost almost all similarity to the way he was created, and lost the potential of becoming the unique creature the Creator had in mind when He created him.

Following this there was a very positive chiddush, when Hashem gave Avraham the mitzvah of milah. Avraham, through his superhuman effort, recreated himself into the originally intended human being. The milah was the sign of Man removing the stigma and disgrace of the corrupted human form reached by universal humanity. It was this chiddush that began the development of a nation that would fulfill the Creator's purpose in creation.

The Midrash Tanchuma Perek 5, on the verse ויקם מלך חדש tells us that we lost this koach, this power of chiddush, in Mitzrayim when Yosef died and we abandoned the mitzvah of milah. The exile started with ויקם מלך חדש, where Rashi says, שנתחדשו גזרותיו, Pharaoh's decrees were made anew. There weren't regular decrees; they were decrees that grew out of the power of chiddush. Once again the koach of chiddush was used to set history into reverse. The words ויקם מלך חדש do not mean, "And a new king arose," but, rather, it means "The king of the chiddush arose." The koach of chiddush was transferred from Avraham's descendants back to the hands of the nations, to Mitzrayim. And with the transfer came the innovative cruel and merciless decrees against our People – נתחדשו גזרותיו.

The redemption began with the giving of the first mitzvah, החודש הזה לכם. The ability to be constantly born anew; that is the secret of our people. At the Exodus from Mitzrayim, Hashem took away the koach of chiddush from the Egyptians and gave it back to Avraham's descendants. He gave us a Torah rooted in the mitzvah of החודש הזה לכם, with the power of chiddush that will give birth to a new world.

May Hashem grant us במהרה בימינו, speedily in our days, that the שירה חדשה, the new song that we sang at the splitting of the Sea, "שירה חדשה שבחו גאולים" – "A new song the redeemed ones sang" – will become the "ונודה לך שיר חדש על גאולתנו ועל פדות נפשינו" – "We will thank you through a new song about our redemption and the liberation of our souls" – with which we end the story of the Exodus in the Haggadah. That is the song we will sing over the ultimate גאולה.

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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