

In midst of instructing Moshe on tumeh/tahara laws, the Torah says this.

וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בְּשָׂר עָרְלָתוֹ:

“And on the eighth day, the foreskin flesh shall be circumcised.” (Vayikra 12:3).

This pasuk does not seem to fit here. The entire section, commencing after the tragedy of Nadav and Avihu, is all about the laws of tumeh/tahara – ritual purification. It starts with korbanos, then which animals are ritually unclean, then a woman after giving birth, followed by tzoras and discharges. This pasuk seems to be placed here, unexpectedly. Also, is this where the law of milah is taught?

The Torah commences this section with: וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לְאָמֹר: “And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying.” (Ibid 12:1). Hashem only spoke to Moshe. Hashem taught both Moshe and Aharon the laws of animal purity (ibid 11:1), tzoras on the skin (ibid 13:1), tzoras on houses (ibid 14:33), and when men and women have discharges (ibid 15:1). Hashem singled out Moshe to teach him about the korbanos of the metzora—those inflicted with tzoras. (Ibid 14:1). Moshe is singled out here because this may harken back to when Hashem taught Moshe all the laws of korbanos prior to him setting up the Mishkan—or the days of ordination. Therefore, even if the laws of the metzora were taught to Moshe and Aharon here, the laws of the korbanos brought for the metzora were taught to Moshe earlier, but mentioned here for convenience. However, what about the purity state of a woman giving birth?

Additionally, the section of a mother’s purity status after childbirth is also connected to the command דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “speak to Bnei Yisroel.” (Ibid 12:2). This is only the second place in this entire parsha (section about the purity laws) that asks Moshe to convey it to Bnei Yisroel by command—the other being animal purity. The reason for this being taught only to Moshe, is because these laws about a birthmother’s purity status is really about her kobanos. (Ibid 12:6). Why then, is this section sandwiched between animal purity and other forms of impurity?

The Torah has a purpose in putting the laws of milah and a birthmother’s purity here. The Torah introduces the laws of purity in animals by telling Moshe and Aharon to convey them to Bnei Yisroel. (Ibid 11:2). זֵאת הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ מִכָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאָרֶץ: “These you may eat, from all the animals on the earth.” (Ibid). Now that the Mishkan was set up and Aharon and his sons had their ordination, (and we will later learn that the president of every shevet brought an inaugural korban for the mizbeach), the laws of eating animals is taught. Until this time, ostensibly, the eating of animals was not permitted.

That is why the nation complained to Moshe seeking meat. שָׁמְעֵתִי אֶת-תְּלִיזוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “I have heard the complaint of Bnei Yisrael.” (Shmos 16:12). “By evening they shall eat meat.” (Ibid). Then Hashem sent the quail. (Ibid 16:13). Why did they cry out

for meat? Why did they not just eat their animals? They clearly had animals because they had what to use for skins and korbanos, and the Torah mentions they left with an abundance of beasts. The answer is, they could not eat meat. They were commanded to eat Korban Pesach, but since then, they did not eat any meat. It was not until the Mishkan was set up that meat was permitted for consumption again. Bnei Yisroel were now allowed to slaughter these kosher animals as mincha, Todah, or shlomim offerings, and then eat that meat. It was not until later that the Torah permitted eating meat without the prerequisite of offering a korban. (Devorim 12:20).

Moshe was taught about a birthmother's purity status earlier, in connection to her korban. It was relayed here to teach that a person is pure and must remain so. What Bnei Yisroel ate had to be pure. It was connected to the Mishkan. Further, a woman who gives birth and has discharge, that can make her ritually tammeh. However, the product of the birth is holy. For a male, there is circumcision. That demonstrates that a mundane body can be made pure. The milah is a requisite to entering the covenant / pact with Hashem. To be a male of the nation, a milah is required. The pact and being part of the nation means keeping the body ritually pure. What follows is other skin conditions on the body, clothes, and buildings, and then bodily discharges. All of these laws relate to maintaining spiritual hygiene. The regression is from actively touching unclean animals, experiencing life affirming achievements that come with natural discharges, to irregularities on skin and then other discharges. However, one that becomes tameh can become pure. Just as a mundane male body becomes holy upon circumcision. Even if tameh, once in the fold, one cannot leave the fold.

Circumcision is first introduced to Avraham prior to hearing the news about having Yitzchok. (Bereishis 17:10). While Avraham was ninety-nine years old, his progeny would be circumcised into the faith at eight-days old. (Ibid 17:12). The obligation is on the father, but then is on the son if the father fails. (Ibid 17:14). It is the son that remains uncircumcised that has broken the bris. (Ibid). Avraham, later, circumcised Yitzchok at eight days. (Ibid 21:4). Milah is then not mentioned in connection with Yaakov or the Shevatim – presumably they followed this law. Yaakov's sons mentioned it to the residents of Shechem, (Ibid 34:15), and Yocheved mentions it to the assassin at the inn (Shmos 4:26). As a law, it is first mentioned again in connection to the korban Pesach. (Ibid 12:44). Moshe had no need to teach the laws of milah itself, as Bnei Yisroel knew it from Avraham. After it is taught again here, it is not mentioned again until Yehoshua has the nation circumcised upon entering the Land. (Yehoshua 5:2). Once in the fold, one can not leave the fold.

A final point is the importance of: "On the eighth day." This is in contrast to the previous "On the eighth day." (Vaykra 9:1). That eighth day was the first day of Pesach. (See M'M on Parshas Shmini 5783). On that eighth day, Bnei Yisroel made Pesach in the desert. There is a connection of the eighth days. There is also a connection of milah to Pesach. That eighth day – Pesach – was a day that Hashem made Bnei Yisroel his nation. On the eighth day of an infant male's life, he is circumcised into the same pact. Korban Pesach can only be eaten by those circumcised. The two symbol being in the fold and the two are linked.