BS"D
April 16, 2021; 4 Iyar5781
Friday is the 19th day of the Omer

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 8 #26, April 16, 2021; Tazria-Metzora 5781

NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.

The greatest day of Aharon's life, his inauguration as Kohen Gadol for the newly dedicated Mishkan, turned into his worst nightmare as his sons Nadav and Avihu brought incense to the alter (on their own initiative) and died from a blast from heaven. The Torah immediately interrupts the chronological flow of the Torah with an extended recitation of God's rules for anyone approaching the vicinity of the Mishkan. In the double parsha of Tazria-Metzora, the Torah discusses ritual purity – conditions defining when a person is tahor (ritually pure) and when tamei (ritually impure and therefore not permitted in the area).

The classic cause of tumah (becoming tamei) involves contact with a dead body. The Torah, however, starts with tamei from childbirth. After giving birth to a boy, a woman is tamei for seven days and then becomes tahor (although still bleeding) after the baby's bris. After giving birth to a baby girl, however, the mother remains tamei for fourteen days. Immediately after presenting the laws of tamei after childbirth, the Torah moves to tumah from tzaraat on the skin, clothing, and homes.

Rabbi David Fohrman asks why the Torah moves directly from tamei resulting from childbirth to tamei from tzaraat. The connection he identifies is that both cases involve a person who has faced mortality. A woman going through pregnancy and childbirth faces potential death from the ordeal. The only case of tzaraat in the Torah involves Miriam, at the end of Behaalotecha, when she speaks lashon horah about Moshe and immediately catches tzaraat. Aharon describes her tzaraat as giving her skin an appearance of a dead person. The Torah considers a metzora to be half dead. As Rabbi Fohrman observes, a metzora is a person who is still alive as an individual but dead with respect to other people. He must leave the camp (stay outside the camp or city, away from other people) and shout "tamei! tamei!" when anyone comes near. Contact with a corpse and a metzora are the only two cases in which everyone in the same room becomes tamei (secondary tamei) for a week.

The purification procedures for childbirth and tzaraat closely resemble the ritual for the Korban Pesach. As Rabbi Fohrman observes, the original Korban Pesach involved purification after contact with death – the tenth plague, killing of the first born, the only other incident besides tzaraat that the Torah describes as a "negah." The Egyptian first born died in this plague, and the Jews who placed blood on their door posts and followed the other conditions escaped death (but faced a threat of death and therefore had a brush with mortality.) The ritual of the red heifer (Chukat), purification after contact with a dead body, also involves wood, blood, a scarlet thread, and a hyssop plant. All of these examples involve contact with death or near death events and some of the same unusual items.

Most commentaries on our double parsha focus on the causes of tzaraat, most notably speaking lashon horah (evil speech). Tzaraat, most commonly associated with lashon horah, is a social disease. There is neither a medical cause nor remedy. Treatment involves the metzora separating himself from the community, reflecting on his condition, and performing teshuvah. During the treatment phase, the metzora is dead socially. Only a kohen could diagnose tzaraat or determine when the metzora is cured. Because Aharon devoted his life to solving disputes among Jews, his family, the Kohenim, earned the mitzvah of bringing relief to the metzora. Physicians have no role in diagnosing or determining cures for tzaraat.

Other than childbirth or contact with a corpse, most of the discussion of tumah in the Torah reflects social shortcomings. A strong link between ritual purity and social shortcomings should not surprise us. Immediately after presenting Aseret Dibrot (the Ten Commandments), the Torah presents specific laws to illustrate these mitzvot (Mishpatim). Someone asked Hillel to summarize the Torah while standing on one foot. His response was not to do to your fellow what you would not want him to do to you. Our prophets focused on kindness to the poor, widows, orphans, and converts as the most important lessons from the Torah – and it is these lessons that constitute a large part of the mitzvot in Mishpatim. Taking care when speaking to and interacting with others, our main lesson from the Chofetz Chaim, is the way to avoid and cure the social problems of the metzora. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, often came back to treating others, especially the disadvantaged members of society, properly. The more I study Torah, the more I see this lesson emerging over and over again.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Menachem Mendel ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Metzorah: Strange Altar-Fellows

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1997

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

Parshas Metzora deals with the purification process of the person afflicted with tzora'as. After the disease healed, the formerly afflicted person is instructed to bring a sacrifice that includes two very diametrical items. "And he shall take two birds, cedar wood, crimson thread and hyssop (Leviticus 14:4)." The Torah details the offering and all of its intricacies, leaving the commentaries to ponder the symbolism of the wood of the tallest of trees bound together with the lowly moss of the hyssop.

Rashi explains that, "the hyssop symbolizes the humility that the metzora should have," and the cedar," he explains, "is a symbolic reminder that he who holds himself as high as the cedar tree should learn to lower himself like the hyssop."

However, wouldn't hyssop alone teach us this characteristic or at least symbolize humility? What point is there in bringing cedar? And, in fact, if bringing moss represents the need for humility couldn't the offering of cedar represent the need for pride? Perhaps there is another explanation for the two attributes to be joined.

A few years after Rabbi Shneur Kotler succeeded his late father Reb Ahron as the Rosh Yeshiva of the Lakewood Yeshiva, the Yeshiva's enrollment began to expand. No longer was Reb Shneur able to sit and study in the large Yeshiva all day. He was suddenly forced to raise funds day in and day out often leaving early in the morning and returning home way past midnight.

A brief respite was the annual convention of Agudath Israel at which nearly 1000 laymen and rabbinical leaders would gather for a long weekend to discuss the state of Torah affairs.

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, the oldest member of the Council of Torah Sages would often highlight the keynote session on Saturday night. As the eldest of the world's Torah sages, Reb Yaakov would find a way to sneak up to the dais, usually through a back door, to avoid having the entire crowd arise upon seeing his presence as is required by Jewish Law. Yet this year things were different. Reb Yaakov engaged the much younger, Reb Shneur in conversation outside the large ballroom and waited until everyone took his or her seats. Then he took Reb Shneur by the hand and said, "I think it is time we took our seats." He proudly held Reb Shneur by the arm and escorted him to the dais as the throng of people rose in awe.

Reb Shneur, stunned by Reb Yaakov's departure from his trademark humility asked him why he did not go through the back as was his usual custom.

"Reb Shneur," he explained, "your Rebbitzen (rabbi's wife) is sitting in the auditorium . The entire year she sees you in a much-dishonored light. You run from donor to donor in order to keep the Yeshiva open, you have hardly any time to prepare your lectures, and all she sees are people knocking on your door with their problems. Yet she stands beside you faithful and unwavering. It is time that she sees that you get a little kavod (honor).

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Gur (1799-1866) explains that sometimes people become so humbled to the point of forgetting that they can actually achieve wonderful accomplishments. Often, humility breeds self-effacement that may lead to despair. Of course Rashi is correct in explaining that those who are haughty as the cedar must humble themselves as mass, but one must also bear in mind an equally important fact – that at times after one has been humiliated as low as the hyssop he must rise in his own eyes to the height of a cedar and proudly exclaim that he can and will accomplish the lofty and far reaching goal to which he or she aspires. And those are goals that only the cedar's limbs can touch.

So, perhaps the lowly hyssop must be bound with a seemingly mismatched and more supercilious counterpart, the cedar. Because when they are offered hand-in-hand, they may have a lot to learn from each other.

Good Shabbos!

Sending the Sick Outside the Camp

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

Who are our modern-day metzoraim, the people who are pushed outside of normal society and keep distant and hidden from everyone else?

The metzora is not a leper, but he is much like one. He has a serious skin disease and is sent outside of the Israelite camp, in an area that would eventually become outside of the city walls of the Land of Israel. We are told that he himself must announce his impure status – "'Impure! Impure!' He shall call out." He must warn everyone to keep their distance, and he is then sent outside of the camp – "בָּדָד יֵשֵׁב – He must live alone. Outside of the camp is his dwelling place" (Leviticus 13:46).

The case of the metzora challenges us to think who in our society are those people whom we have cast outside, people with whom we would rather not engage or ideally even see because they make us uncomfortable, because we are afraid of catching what they have?

Initially, I had seen this as a metaphor for those with disabilities, a topic that is close to my heart. As a parent of two boys on the Autism spectrum, I have felt more than once the harsh sting of "impure," the active and passive ways that my children were excluded from community, friends, and Jewish institutions. And historically speaking, those with disabilities, particularly those with developmental and social-emotional ones, were put in insane asylums and other institutions, kept out of sight and mind of "civilized" society. If we don't see them, we can pretend that they don't exist.

This reality is true, as are its parallels to the metzora. And yet from the Torah's perspective, people with disabilities, at least physical ones, are recognized as very much among us. Not only are we to see them as equal members of society, we are also given explicit mitzvot to avoid the tendency that some might have to abuse and mock them. "You shall not curse the deaf" and "Do not put a stumbling block before the blind" are core mitzvot in the Torah. We have much work to do on the individual and societal level to live up to these mitzvot, to create a society free of bias, barriers, and exclusion. Yet because of those mitzvot, it would not make sense to map the metzora onto these cases. So then, who is a metzora?

As I see it, the metzora serves as a metaphor for the sick, the infirm, and the elderly. Hospitals and nursing homes are absolutely essential institutions for society, and they provide the sick and elderly with life-saving care.

And yet, as institutions, they also keep the sick and elderly outside of society, away from our homes and our parks, our synagogues and shopping centers. Many people prefer it this way. Being around the sick or the elderly makes them feel uncomfortable. It is so much easier to have them where they need not be seen. Isn't it amazing how there are almost no really infirm or sick people in our homes and on our streets!

We cannot allow ourselves to accept this attitude of banishing the sick. Someone has to step up and create a different reality.

Who is the one who tends to the metzora? It is the Kohen. He figures so prominently in our parsha that the word "הַכֹּהֵן" – "The Kohen" appears over 80 times. It is the Kohen who constantly engages with the metzora: checking up on him during the various stages of the development of the tzaraat, and being the one to go out to him when he is healed in order to purify him and bring him back into the camp.

Who serves as our Kohen? The answer is obvious: It is the rabbi. Rabbis are the ones who do the pastoral care, the ones who make bikkur cholim calls. They are the ones who are present for the sick, and who make regular visits to the hospitals and the nursing homes. They represent us when we cannot be bothered to be there ourselves. But we have to be bothered.

We have offloaded onto the rabbi a responsibility that belongs to all of us equally. There are communities that recognize this, particularly in the form of bikkur cholim groups. And yet, even in those communities, we are talking about a small number of individuals. For all the rest of us, it becomes another form of vicarious fulfilment.

The person who steps us has to be each one of us. While the Torah speaks of the Kohen in the case of the metzora, Chazal teach us, again and again, the central mitzvah of bikkur cholim. This mitzvah is rooted in "Love thy neighbor as thyself," a mitzvah which tells us that we must act in the same way we would want to be treated. Beyond that, it is a mitzvah rooted in the core principle that everyone –sick, infirm or elderly–is our neighbor. Everyone is in society among us.

In the age of COVID, this mitzvah has been made easier for us. We Zoom in, we don't have to travel, we don't have to encounter directly, we don't have to over-extend ourselves. This has allowed many more people to visit the sick, undoubtedly. But such Zoom visits, as important as they are, are only a small part of what bikkur cholim is about. Being physically present demands more from us, but it is so much more helpful. Chazal tell us that one who is present with the sick takes away 1/60th of her illness. This is true in a very practical way. When one is present, it lifts spirits. The visitor can advocate for the patient, and this makes a real difference. Doctors and nurses pay more attention to those who have guests, to those who have others who care for them. Perhaps most importantly, our physical presence helps make the one we are visiting connected to the larger human reality and the life that exists outside the hospital. We make them part of our society.

It is our responsibility to do this mitzvah, to not let just the rabbi be the Kohen. Like the Kohen, we must visit and be engaged with the sick, during their illness, and when it is time to bring them back into society. We must, in fact, ensure that they never leave.

Shabbat Shalom.

https://library.yctorah.org/2021/04/sending-the-sick-outside-the-camp/

People Say

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2021 Teach 613

The Parshiyos of Tazria and Metzora are closely identified with the Prohibition against Lashon Horah (gossip). Large sections of these Parshiyos are devoted to the punishment and the atonement of the Metzora, a person afflicted with an ailment attributed to Lashon Horah.

The Chofetz Chaim (d. 1933) was a person who championed awareness and observance of this Mitzva. He wrote a remarkable Sefer (book) on the topic and travelled from city to city speaking about the Mitzva and selling the Sefer so that people could study the details of its laws.

Much of what the Chofetz Chaim encountered was ignorance. People simply were not aware that what they were saying might be Halachicly problematic. In one city, for example, a man came to buy a sefer and said, “I don’t really need it for myself. But my wife sure needs this. So, I’ll buy one for her.” The Chofetz Chaim gave him two copies for the price of one. “This way,” the Chofetz Chaim said, “You can both study the laws.”

The Chofetz Chaim’s campaign against Lashon Horah was quite successful. It created a nationwide awareness that harsh speech can be deadly. In the Jewish world of today, a person can no longer say, “Oh, but I was just saying…” The community has an awareness that “just saying” can also do much damage.

The detailed way in which the Chofetz Chaim addressed the Mitzva made it clear that observance of this Mitzva — like so many other Mitzvos -- has to be precise. Sometimes you will find that you have to disclose negative information, such as in the case of someone who would get hurt in a business or marriage relationship. But the disclosure must be done in a precise, deliberate, and sensitive way so that the relevant Halachos are observed. The details of these Halachos have spawned many written and audio resources, including this author’s series of 120 review sessions entitled, “SH! To Think Before We Speak.” (http://www.teach613.org/programs/sh-shemiras-halashon/)

Shemiras HaLashon (watching what we say) does not mean that we live with an illusion that there are no disagreements. Shemiras Halashon means that we try to resolve disagreements in an amicable way. Sometimes that means that we are Dan LiKaf Zechus (Judge favorably). We try to see another person’s perspective. Sometimes Shemiras HaLashon means that you will take your grievance to the person you feel has wronged you and discuss it. Such discussions require that we be emotionally big and mature. Such discussions are what can bring about mutual understanding and resolution. As the Chofetz Chaim outlines in his work (10:2, 2 and 3) they are actually required in Halacha.

In our time a dangerous bad habit has cropped up which facilitates Lashon Horah in a significant way. Instead of engaging in a conversation to clear up a grievance, there are many who are ashamed to approach those who they feel wronged them. They are not yet ready to maturely own a difference of opinion. Instead, they will spread negative information to all those who will listen, prefacing it with the words, “People are saying…” Parents will complain about teachers, congregants about Shul Presidents and Rabbis, using the words “People are saying.” Instead of maturely identifying the issue and discussing it; the object of Lashon Horah is judged by a supposed public opinion assessed by the speaker. In this way a person can be dubbed insensitive, disorganized, out of touch, or unprofessional, because of something that they did. Interestingly, this is the exact type of speech outlined as forbidden. It is quintessential Lashon Horah.

When Lashon Horah is meant to be spoken Litoeles (for a justified purpose) we are supposed to be specific and not make the issue larger than it is. That means we are supposed to deescalate rather than categorize people as inept because of a specific difference of opinion. There is an obligation to be big and engage in conversation so that the issue can either be corrected or emerge as an eye-opening difference of opinion. By veiling comments under the umbrella of “people are saying” we make dialogue, correction, and reconciliation—all Torah values and responsibilities—totally impossible.

As one teacher said, “If you see a flaw in me, please tell me. I’m the only one who can do anything about it.”

The laws of Lashon Hora are not meant to be onerous and intrusive. The laws of Lashon Horah are meant to make our lives happier and more effective. By striving for resolutions, we grow to become greater people. Through that we are blessed with friendlier and healthier lives.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos!

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Improving the World, One Person at a Time: Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Shemini

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The priests of old (the cohanim) had high prestige positions, serving as spiritual leaders of the people of Israel. They received priestly gifts and seem to have lived comfortable lives.

Yet, when we read this week's Torah portion, we see that the cohanim had some unpleasant responsibilities. They had to examine the wounds of lepers and arrange for their purification. They had to check out clothing and houses that were struck by a leprosy-type plague. If we also consider that the tasks of the cohanim included the daily slaughtering of animals in the Tabernacle (and later in the Temples in Jerusalem), we realize that the cohanim did not always have an easy go of things.

Let us imagine how three cohanim would have described their duties.

Cohen A: I have a miserable job, but I have no choice in the matter. I'm a cohen, so this is my lot. I toil at many unpleasant tasks; but I need to do these things to make a living. I have a job..

Cohen B: My work has its ups and downs. Although I don't enjoy all aspects of my responsibilities, I do my best. I want to gain the respect of my peers and the public at large. Perhaps if I work hard enough, I will rise in the priestly ranks, and maybe even become the High Priest. I have a career.

Cohen C: I am privileged to be a servant of the Lord and to fulfill His commandments. When I bring sacrifices I feel I am helping people to come closer to God. When I examine the wounds of lepers, I have the opportunity to help the forlorn and downtrodden and to bring them purification. I am blessed to have these special opportunities. I have a calling.

What is the difference between these three cohanim? They all perform the same duties and have the same responsibilities. The difference isn't objective, but subjective. The difference is in how they interpret their lives and their duties.

Cohen A sees himself as a victim trapped in a bad job. He derives little satisfaction from his work, and probably looks forward to the day when he can retire. He has to work, because he needs to feed himself and his family.

Cohen B is not enthusiastic about his work, but sees it as a framework for personal advancement. If he works hard and well, he may advance to a higher position. Even if he doesn't like all aspects of his work, he has the inner satisfaction of feeling a challenge to rise in the ranks.

Cohen C focuses on the good he can do in his position--how he can help people come closer to God and to achieve spiritual purification. He views the unpleasant tasks as positive opportunities to serve God and the community. He feels a special joy in having been chosen to do his work.

While Cohen A is probably unhappy most of his working days, and while Cohen B is modestly pleased with himself--Cohen C is by far the happiest. He is the only one who interprets his work not as a job or a career--but as a calling. He sees ultimate value in his responsibilities, even in those things that seem so tedious and messy.

Now, let us apply the lessons of these three cohanim to ourselves.

We all need to work for a living. We all have aspects of our work that are pleasing, and aspects that are not so pleasing. Some of us are miserable at our work, some are moderately satisfied, and some are really happy. The difference is not necessarily in the kind of work we do: but in our attitude toward our work.

Some people have jobs. They work for their paycheck. They need to earn a living and support themselves and their families. But they don't particularly like their work. They don't see any ultimate value in it, or much personal fulfillment in it. They may spend thirty or forty years at a job they really don't like and don't enjoy. But they feel trapped. They have no choice. They have to work, and this is their job.

Some people have careers. They work for a company that gives incentives for increased pay, and higher prestige positions. They don't necessarily see ultimate value in their work, but it's a living and provides a certain degree of excitement and upward mobility. They work for thirty or forty years at it, and can't figure out exactly what they accomplished in their years, except for receiving paychecks and rising to higher ranks in the company. What difference did it all make?

Some people have callings. They work not for themselves and not for their companies--but for some higher vision of what life is supposed to be. They seek meaning and fulfillment in life. They are idealists who can view the simplest and most menial tasks as an entryway to personal redemption. They genuinely want to help others, to do their share to create a better society and a better world, to fulfill the expectations that the Almighty has for them.

In the final anaylysis, all of us can be in the category of Cohen C--if only we will set our minds to it, if only we will see our lives in larger brushstrokes, if only we can imagine that what we do really has ultimate value. We are not just cogs in a wheel who perform tasks for pay. We are not just go-getters who strive to get ahead of others on the treadmill. No, we are human beings seeking personal meaning and fulfillment in our lives.

Whatever kind of work we do, we can see it as a job, or a career--or a calling. A shift in vision, a shift in attitude--and we can become different and better and happier people..

* https://www.jewishideas.org/jobs-careers-and-callings-thoughts-parashat-metsora **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time**.

Orthodox Isn't Enough

By Pamela Ehrenkranz *

What could be a better place to work for a traditionally observant Jew than a Jewish organization? Jewish holidays are not considered vacation days, and there is little resistance, if any, to the need to leave early on a Friday to reach home and prepare before the start of Shabbat. So when I moved from the for-profit world to a Jewish non-profit 20 years ago, I never anticipated any Jewish dilemmas. In retrospect, that was a deliciously naïve perspective.

In reality, a professional who is an Orthodox Jew faces both challenges and opportunities in a secular Jewish organization. The challenges are considerable, because this world is a 24/7 place, with people expecting instant response and constant connection. Unplugging and being off the grid for the 25 hours of Shabbat was tolerated. But when I became unreachable for three days because of Shabbat followed by a two-day holiday, being unavailable became an obstacle. On one such occasion, my boss asked if I could take her calls, “just this once” because “we had an event coming up.” Unexpectedly, I confronted a world in which many of my Jewish practices were considered “other,” even though I worked

exclusively with Jews. I had simply assumed working in the Jewish world that observing the holidays would have been a given.

The challenges began to mount. After a while, donors with whom I was friendly began inviting me to semahot that took place on Shabbat, or that were not kosher. I found myself trying to repeatedly explain why I could not check email on a holiday that a majority of Jews in our community don't celebrate, such as Shemini Atzeret, and so forth. Should I hire a qualified candidate who was interviewed off-site at her request and who ordered a bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich during our breakfast meeting? The response to these quandaries has significant impact. In fact, it is the quintessential opportunity. But first, a more detailed look at the challenges.

On the same day that I began my job at a small Jewish Federation in 1996, a Chabad House opened its doors in a town where, at the time, people still felt the need to say "Shana Tova" in a whisper at the supermarket. An influential board member took me out for coffee to tell me that if I ran an article in the Federation newspaper about Chabad being in town, I would be responsible "for the collapse of the Federation and for thousands of Jews going hungry in Israel and around the world." His position was that the Jewish community was not ready for Chabad, and that the community would want to distance itself from the Federation if we were seen as supporting their operation. This man belonged to a Conservative synagogue, and was deeply connected to Judaism—and I was new on the job.

So when the editorial meeting took place, I suggested we hold off on the announcement. After all, I did not want to be responsible for the destruction of the Jewish community! The editor, an equally influential board member, affiliated with the Reform movement and self-avowedly secular, informed me that withholding the announcement was unethical. She said she would abide by a decision to delay for one month, but if the news that a new Jewish organization—albeit one that did not have even one follower in town—was omitted from the next publication, she would resign. I was stunned. The editor had no allegiance to Chabad, but she had a strong allegiance to the local community and to doing the right thing.

My 30-something-year-old-Orthodox-self went home with more questions than answers. How could I have missed that I was being pressured into protecting a political interest? How could I, observant and committed, have been so willing to make an unethical editorial call? I was taught that my Judaism was supposed to guide me in every situation—religious or secular— but this time it eluded me. The lesson I learned here came not from my own Jewish center but from hers—and so began my experience of wisdom that comes from learning from every person. We ran the article. The irony? Chabad has become one of the most successful synagogues for young families in town, engaging them in sold-out and standing-room-only religious, educational, and social programming; day camp; and preschool. All of this in the same town that was not "ready" for Chabad 20 years ago.

A few months after I was hired, several donors suggested that we hire a kosher caterer for our annual gala. For as many years as the Federation had hosted a gala, a non-kosher caterer had always catered it—serving dairy foods and fish with the explicit instruction not to prepare or serve any meat or shellfish products. At that time not one donor had a religious problem with eating dairy or fish when eating out, and I do not know for sure what prompted the request. A special executive committee meeting was called, and the president of the Federation asked me to come to his office a few days prior to the meeting. He wanted me to prepare a few remarks and to recommend a position. "I can't," I told him. I tried to explain the concept of nogeiah ba'davar, that I had an interest in the outcome of the vote. "I don't understand. Why would you care one way or the other?" he asked. "Because I keep kosher. I would have to recommend that we use a kosher caterer. I am Orthodox." He looked at me for a minute and mused, almost to himself, "I wonder if we knew that when we hired you—if we would have hired you."

I was more surprised than he was. How could he not know? How could being Orthodox be viewed as a negative attribute for an employee in a Jewish organization? Over the years, I came to learn that he meant no harm; he was a mensch, kind, generous, and above all, fair. I think he was just wondering aloud, but a small part of me knew he was right: had my observance been revealed in advance, it might have been an impediment in this overwhelmingly secular community in a town that didn't warmly embrace Jews. I clearly didn't fit the stereotype that those who interviewed me might have held, but for the first time, I was sensitized to the fact that I needed to be cautious in some way about my newly revealed Orthodoxy.

In the end, we decided not to create a policy on kashruth, despite the fact that the outcome of the vote was to hire a kosher caterer. That board meeting was very contentious, and the call for a kosher caterer was won by only one vote—not a decisive majority. Because the conversation focused essentially on the issue of inclusion and making it possible for any Jew to eat at our events, we decided that as a community organization, decisions like this would be backed by our most

critical values—and one of those was the value of being welcoming and inclusive. Since then, whenever an event chairperson asked what the policy was on kosher catering, we told them we did not have a policy. We did, however, have a guiding principle of inclusivity. If event chairs wanted to make a case to the board that fancier presentation or a more sophisticated menu trumped inclusion, we would hire a non-kosher caterer and have a dairy menu. No one has ever opted for the non-kosher caterer. Today, no one even asks the question. We simply have kosher events. It required restraint on my part to distance myself from that debate and not offer my personal point of view. And I learned to try to keep strong boundaries between my personal ritual observance and beliefs and my professional decisions. The community always comes first—as long as I do not violate my standards of observance.

Several years after the kashruth vote, I went out for a drink with a divorced lay leader and her boyfriend, whom she had wanted me to meet. She was a board member and a friend. I knew three things about this man: that he was important to her, that he was separated but not divorced from his wife, and that he had a daughter. While we were in the restaurant, other members of the board saw us and came over to say hello. The next day, I got a call from a friend of one of the board members who greeted us in the restaurant, who was also a board member, "summoning" me to Starbucks. "I heard you were out with so and so and her married boyfriend for a drink. What a shock that you would stoop so low! How dare you be seen with her and a married man—if your father could see you, he would be rolling over in his grave with shame. You, who are the moral compass of this community, have lost all credibility."

There is a lot to say about this conversation, including the fact that while she knew and respected my uncle, who was an Orthodox rabbi, she had never met my father. She could not know that my father had once instructed me never to stick my nose into other people's significant relationships or to pass judgment on them. I wanted to say that it takes tremendous chutzpah to invoke the imagined disapproval of my recently deceased father, that it is God who judges these situations, not I, and that my moral compass was in the same place it was the day before. But I wanted to keep my job, so I stayed silent. When I got back to the office, I started calling board members who still held my trust. "Is this a violation of my position? Am I not to go out socially with board members if I, or others in the community, disapprove of their relationships?" It took only a few calls for a couple of things to become clear: first, that no one else on my board agreed with the woman who had scolded me, but that being Orthodox held me to a different standard from everyone else; second, that I could see that in a few short years, being Orthodox was no longer a negative—I was seen as the moral compass. Or was that just another assumption?

Imagine my surprise when I discovered that I, too, had bought into some well-worn stereotypes. The setting was the Melton Adult Education course that I team-taught several years ago with an Orthodox rabbi. At one session, a participant in the class indicated that she thought Orthodox women were enslaved by the routine of cleaning and cooking prior to Shabbat, and then serving and cleaning up after the meals, especially when dishwasher use was forbidden. She imagined that on Friday night, all a woman could be was exhausted. I told her that in my home, although it may not be the norm, these tasks were shared equally, but that she should ask the rabbi what he thought the following week. Although I made a mental note to warn him, I forgot.

As he came out of the class, I asked him if the notion of women being enslaved on Shabbat came up. He nodded. "Oh no! I am so sorry—I meant to give you a heads up. What did you say?" I admit to having been a little panicked. "I told the truth," he said. My spirits were dashed. "What's the truth?" Without even breaking a smile, he said, "My wife has a full-time job and I am home on Fridays. So the entire responsibility of preparing for Shabbat falls to me." Why did I think I needed to warn him? Because the archetypal image of the exhausted woman was in my mind, too: the wife, preparing everything and the man coming home from shul to a warm, clean house and a delicious meal that he had no part in preparing had been branded in my consciousness from childhood stories—and perhaps from a bit of childhood experience.

Another colleague also made me confront my stereotypical assumptions. When filling out forms for the annual Federation conference and the shabbaton that preceded it, she blurted out "I am so offended by this form!" I was filling out the same form and found nothing offensive in its request for standard information: name, address, credit card, and a box to check if I was Sabbath observant, presumably so I would be housed on a lower floor in the hotel. "What offends you about this?" I asked. She, clearly upset, said, "I am assuming that the boxes 'I am Sabbath observant' and 'I am not Sabbath observant' have to do with the elevator on Shabbat. How should someone like me answer this? I light candles every week. I go to shul often. I always observe the Sabbath—just not the same way you do, not by Orthodox standards. It's offensive to me that I should have to write that I am not Sabbath observant!" I saw her point. I shrugged and said, "So, write that you are," which seemed like a logical response to me. "But then I am potentially taking away a room on a lower floor from someone who really needs it. That's not right, either." Despite her being offended, she exhibited respect for others and their

personal needs. There was another moral compass in the office, one who understood that language matters, that many Jews “Remember the Sabbath day,” perhaps not in the same way Orthodox Jews remember.

Yet there are times when my personal observance inevitably collides with my ethical and professional obligations to the organization in a more complicated way. Although ritual observance is important to me personally, caring for vulnerable Jewish populations is part of my personal practice as well as my professional mission. Every extra dollar spent might deprive a person in need; charity dollars are to be allocated carefully.

On the Thursday before a weekend when Yom Kippur fell on Shabbat, a Jewish colleague informed me that, after morning Yom Kippur services, she would be picking up the van we needed for an event the next day. “Why would you do that on Yom Kippur?” I wanted to know. “First of all, it’s $90 cheaper. Second of all, that bothers you, not me. There is a break in the services for a couple of hours, and it fits my schedule better to do it this way.” I was stunned. She was an affiliated Reform Jew, deeply committed to the Jewish people, Israel, and the community.

“I don’t understand. Do you think we, as an organization, should be renting a van on Yom Kippur? Doesn’t it strike you as incongruous?” I was feeling a twang of guilt both for being holier than thou and for suggesting the extra expense. “Well, if we were a synagogue, I would feel differently. But we are a secular Jewish organization. It’s not part of the mission statement. Our mission is to help people and to use the charity funds in a responsible way.” I couldn’t help but feel that, just as certain basic ethics in the Torah are not spelled out but nonetheless expected, not doing business on Yom Kippur was implicit. Her argument, however, was crystal clear. She worked for a Jewish organization but, like the people who supported us, ritual observance by Orthodox standards did not define her as an individual or a professional. I walked away. It gnawed at me all day as I tried to keep those personal and professional standards separate and clear. But I could not. I went into her office before heading home. “I don’t want you to pick up the van on Yom Kippur. And I don’t want the Federation to incur additional cost. So please, pick up the van on Friday afternoon. I will donate the $90.”

And so I did. We had no time to get an official policy from the board, and it was not clear to me if a secular Jewish organization should limit how and when employees conduct business through the lens of ritual observance. The interaction has been a springboard for many conversations about how we see the Jewish world, our obligations or responsibilities as Jews, and what being a “good Jew” looks like, if there is such a thing. Most importantly, it opened the door for us to engage in exchanges about our deepest Jewish values and priorities, to determine where we have common ground, and to accept the merit of the other’s perspective. Hours of debate and conversation have led us to adopt our own policies that seem to work for the community and for each other. We have learned to recognize in advance when colliding values will put us in a position of conflict, so we now have the luxury of time to creatively resolve it. But both of my colleagues showed me that my own lens was too narrow; that language matters, and the expression “observant Jews” is not synonymous with “Orthodox Jews.” They both helped me understand that there are other negative perceptions about Orthodox Jews: that we set the rules; that we don’t make room for people to observe differently from the way we do; that we want to impose our language and our standards on others because we judge them. In judging them, or making them feel that we do, we alienate them.

Consider the way we refer to formerly Orthodox Jews; we say they are “off the derekh” which implies that there is in fact, only one way to be Jewish and this language implies criticism and condescension. We are in a unique position to change these perceptions among colleagues and lay leaders by choosing our words more carefully and widening our embrace of the diverse ways Jews connect to Judaism and to community. We need to stop believing that we have the monopoly on truth and that our observance of rituals or Shabbat somehow makes us better Jews than non-Orthodox Jews. The greatest opportunity of being an Orthodox professional in a secular world is that you can begin to shatter the stereotypes.

It takes a little tzimtzum, self-contracting and humility, for any Orthodox Jew—not only professionals in Jewish organizations—to be part of the secular Jewish world, and to set boundaries, when possible, between one’s personal standards and professional ones. I can attend a simha without making the baalei simha feel bad about the food or the timing or the place. It is not always necessary to say, “I need a kosher meal.” Sometimes, you just don’t eat where you can’t eat. If I can’t be there until two hours into the simha, rather than deliver an explanation about Shabbat and its restrictions, I simply ask, “Would it be okay if we arrive a couple of hours late?” Hamevin yavin. (Those who understand will understand.) The many years in this job have reminded continually that there are two equally important aspects to being an observant Jew—the rituals and the interpersonal mitzvoth. Orthodox Day Schools provide a great deal of training about what to do and what not to do when it comes to Jewish ritual observance. But Rabbi Joseph Telushkin said “the greatest disservice we do is to equate religion only with ritual observance.” It is the stereotype of equating being Orthodox with being religious.

We need to consider that there are secular Jews who are as scrupulous about observing the mitzvoth that govern interpersonal behavior as Orthodox Jews are about trying to observe both. Since the Torah dictates both sets of mitzvoth, we must find room to consider those Jews who are philanthropists, honest, and stringent about their ethics and commitment to social justice as Jewishly observant.

The gold standard clearly is commitment to both the ritual and interpersonal rules. The word "observant" seems never used to describe how we treat others. But it should be. For Orthodox Jews to meet that gold standard, they would have to be both Orthodox and observant, paying the same careful attention to caring for the needs of others individually and communally, and to using language that demonstrates dignity and respect to all Jews, despite our differences. Ultimately, we need to use our commitment to Torah and mitzvoth to exhibit that traditional ritual observance is not only about accepting Torah obligations; it is a commitment that should lead us to become more compassionate and ethical, to be a moral compass, not the moral compass in our diverse Jewish communities.

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/orthodox-isnt-enough.

Parshas Tazria Metzorah – The Honorable Sinner

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

There is a beautiful Medrash at the beginning of the laws of *tzara'as* – leprosy. The Medash notes that the laws of *tzara'as* are presented differently from other laws in the Torah. In other instances we are told that Hashem spoke to Moshe and told him to speak to the Jewish people. However, regarding the laws of *tzara'as*, the phrase "speak to the children of Israel" is notably missing. (Vayikra 13:1-2) The Medrash explains that Hashem preferred not to mention us, the precious Jewish people, in the context of *tzara'as.* Hashem seeks to judge us as innocent and righteous, and to avoid convicting us. He, therefore, did not specifically say to instruct the Jewish people in these laws, as if to say that these laws were not intended to apply to us.

The Medrash continues with an even more powerful statement. Hashem avoids using His name in the context of anything bad. For example, although Hashem's name is found throughout Parshas Bereishis, when declaring the verdicts after the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, G-d's name is not mentioned. The Torah simply states, "And He said to the woman". (Bereishis 3:16) In His great love and respect for His beloved nation, Hashem treated us as He Himself is treated and accorded us the same honor. He omitted the phrase "speak to the children of Israel" so that our name should not be connected with *tzara'as.* (Tanchuma Tazria 9)

Although *tzara'as* and all of its laws and ritual impurity only apply to the Jewish people and most certainly did happen to people at times, in His great love for us and in His desire to judge us as righteous, Hashem altered the normal wording of the Torah. He did not want us openly connected with this punishment.

Yet, just a few chapters later, we find what seems to be a very different perspective in the Medrash. The Medrash brings a parable of a man who bought a rebellious slave. Knowing that he would have difficulty, he bought chains and whips at the same time as he bought the slave. When the slave began rebelling, he brought out those chains to bind him and the whips to punish him. At this point, the slave asked the master, "If you knew I was a rebellious slave, why did you buy me?" The master responded, "I knew you were a rebellious slave and therefore I prepared all of this for you." The Medrash explains that the chains and the whips are *tzara'as.* When Hashem created mankind, He knew that we would sin. He, therefore, created *tzara'as* before creating man, so that our punishment would be ready at hand when it was needed. (Tanchuma Metzorah 4)

This Medrash seems to present a stark contrast to the earlier Medrash. How can it be that Hashem views us as hopelessly rebellious, and yet accords us such honor and seeks to judge us as righteous?

I believe the answer to this conflict is found in a third section of the Medrash. The Medrash tells us that when Hashem brings punishment, it is only for the purpose of leading the sinner and others to repent. When Hashem afflicts us with *tzara'as,* He carefully punishes us in stages in order to give us a chance to repent. First it comes on the house, then on

one's clothing and only then on one's body. Hashem gives each stage as a warning, hoping we'll get the message and He won't have to punish us further. (Tanchuma Metzora 4)

From this perspective, perhaps we can reconcile the first two Medrashim. When punishments are given as a means to encourage improvement, we only punish those we believe can improve. Anyone who is hopeless, is simply sent on their way. Hashem prepared the punishments for us, because He knows that although we will certainly face challenges and failure, we have the ability to rise above and overcome. It was for this potential that Hashem created our punishments. *Tzara'as* only exists because G-d believes in us.

Perhaps, this potential is the message of the first Medrash. G-d knows we may fail, but that is not what He sees in us. Instead, He sees our potential to rise above. Even though He knows we will sin, He still seeks to judge us as righteous, and still honors us as He honors Himself. G-d's love for us is because He believes in us.

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Shtisel Season 3 Review

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

What better way to celebrate Israeli Independence day than to contemplate a Jewish cultural phenomenon that having our own state has given birth to. I remember trying to watch the first season of Shtisel off an obscure Israeli website which didn't even have subtitles (or all the episodes). Now this "chareidi soap opera" has hit the mainstream with its availabilty to stream on Netflix.

The heart of the show has always been a tragicomic one. Like a good joke, we all come to Shtisel with expectations that the show then flips on our heads.

Some of us have convinced ourselves that those living the ultra-Orthodox way have freed themselves from the complexities of life and human emotions through strict adherence to sacred duty and communal norms. Indeed, Shulem Shtisel, the patriarch of the family, exemplifies this approach through his absolute fidelity to the community rules that his family should be following, rather than personal intuition. In previous seasons, he did his best to encourage his son Akiva into an (unsuitable) marriage, to dissuade him from becoming an artist, and in this season, he gives up a large donation and a potential relationship because of the woman's admiration for Religious Zionist poets. Shulem is the old order. He is the paragon and overarching presence of absolute traditional norms on the show.

But cracks soon appear. As we see the characters explore their world, we realize that humanity in its individual glory can never be reduced to rules, no matter how hard we try. The main conflicts of the show come from the characters (even Shulem) confronting the idea of deviation from well established practice when matters of the heart come into play.

(Before we go any further, let's make a distinction between Jewish law and communal custom. The struggles of the Shtisel family are not whether they should keep kosher or Shabbat, but what to do when your individual drive conflicts with something that a society considers normal, like proper dating procedure, type of kippah you wear, or how you should react emotionally to grief and loss when the halachic mourning period ends.)

Nowhere is this tension between norms and personal feeling seen more than in the blossoming of love. Yossele, the straight as an arrow yeshiva boy, accidentally falls for a lady whose Jewish ethnic background would have prevented them from being formally introduced. Lippe Weiss has many ideas (like being an extra in a movie) that stress his wife Giti and their relationship to a brink. "Why can't you just be a simple Jew?!" she exclaims to him. Shulem also is not free from finding his own love path.

This theme of the show reaches its apotheosis in Giti Weiss. In each season, each of the Shtisel members get their own adventure. But with Giti especially, we see a crafted character arc as she navigates life oscillating between individuality and obeisance to chareidi culture. When her son Yossele pines that he's in love with a girl, she dismisses it as "shtuyot" (nonsense). When her husband tells her that the girl her son "loves" is Algerian, she refuses, saying, "Just once this family should go by the book!".

When I saw this I laughed as I remembered the first season where the show shows Giti rejecting her parents' advice and marrying Lippe because she saw something in him that attracted her. (The parents did not like that Lippe drove a car.) She chose her own path and yet throughout the seasons, she tries desperately to keep everything "normal." Other characters like Akiva embrace their individuality, but Giti constantly shifts between the world of the heart and the world of communal expectations. Sometimes she obsesses about being normal, but at other times she gives in. Neta Riskin does a fabulous job portraying this conflicted character. Somehow she communicates a torrent of feeling behind Giti's stoic countenance. (At times, I feel that she's about to blow.) Her conflict with Lippe this season shines as one of the most human stories of the show. Giti's reticence to change stands in opposition to her life's decisions. Many times what we say we want is not what we actually want. To see a chareidi woman continuously go through such situations of inner conflict allows us to relate to someone that we never would have dreamed we could.

Shtisel continues to challenge us by breaking the idealistic bubble that surrounds a life of absolute structure. Religiosity can help us navigate life but cannot shield us from it. Thinking that a chareidi style of life will drown life's doubts and changing winds is but a fantasy. The whole wide society is a narrow bridge that we must cross and navigate. Sometimes we look at those who seem to have it all figured out with their commitment to uniformity. They don't seem to be on the bridge with us which can cause someone to feel dislike for that way of life. But Shtisel shows us that our brethren may be on a different color bridge, but are not free from traversing it. Like a fiddler on the roof, we're all trying to keep our balance.

And that's the magic of Israel. All Jews can see each other and share the same land. When we recognize our common human experience, we begin to empathize and not see them as an other but as a brother.

That was my reaction to the show. What was yours? And if you haven't seen it, I highly recommend you put it on your Netflix watch list.

May Israel make more groundbreaking and meaningful shows over the next 73 years and beyond!

Shabbat Shalom.

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Rav Kook Torah
Metzora: The Power of Speech

Only in Israel

What is the root cause for the disease of tzara'at as described in the Torah? The Midrash explains that this skin disease is a punishment for gossip and slander. A person suffering from tzara'at is called a metzora because he is "motzee sheim ra" — he spreads derogatory reports (Vayikra Rabbah 16:1. See Rambam, Laws of Tzara'at 16:15, that one fulfills the mitzvah "Be careful regarding tzara'at" (Deut. 24:8-9) by avoiding gossip).

Given that tzara'at is brought about by slander, one would expect that all peoples would be afflicted, since even non-Jews are culpable for personal damages. Yet, Maimonides wrote that tzara'at is not a natural phenomenon, but a unique sign found only among the people of Israel. Why should only the Jewish people suffer from this ailment?

Divine Speech

There are two types of speech. There is everyday speech, based on and limited to that which occurs in the physical universe. And there is a higher form of speech, a holy speech that God bestowed upon Israel. This elevated speech does not originate from the physical world. On the contrary, the world originates from it. This is the speech through which God created the world. "Through the word of God, the heavens were made; and through the breath of His mouth, all of their hosts" (Psalms 33:6).

God granted us the power of His speech, the speech that preceded the world, when He gave us the Torah, the blueprint of creation. "He looked in the Torah and created the universe" (Zohar Terumah 161b). The transmission of Divine speech

to the Jewish people is alluded to in the verse: “I put my speech in your mouth... to plant the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth” (Isaiah 51:16).

Redemption of Speech

The Kabbalists explained that the Hebrew name for Passover, Pesach, is a combination of the words peh sach — “the mouth speaks.” The redemption from Egypt, which paved the way for the Torah’s revelation at Sinai, also redeemed the faculty of speech. For this reason, Passover is commemorated with a mitzvah of speech, the mitzvah to retell the story of the Exodus. And we find that Moses, aware of this aspect of the redemption from Egypt, tried to disqualify himself by protesting, “I am not a man of speech” (Exod. 4:10).

In an essay entitled “The Redemption of Speech,” Rav Kook wrote:

> *“Sometimes we can sense the connection between our speech and the universe. This is the initial step to redeem speech from its exile.*
>
> *“As the soul is elevated, we become acutely aware of the tremendous power that lies in our faculty of speech. We recognize clearly the tremendous significance of each utterance; the value of our prayers and blessings, the value of our Torah study and of all of our discourse. We learn to perceive the overall impact of speech. We sense the change and great stirring of the world that comes about through speech.”* (Orot HaKodesh vol. III, p. 285)

Two Mouths

The most striking expression of the difference between these two levels of speech is the remarkable statement of Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai:

> *“Had I been present at Mount Sinai, I would have requested that God create us with two mouths: one mouth to speak in words of Torah, and one mouth for all of our worldly needs.” (Jerusalem Talmud*, Berachot 1:2)

We may lack a mouth dedicated exclusively to Torah and prayer, but we can still deepen our awareness of the extraordinary nature of holy speech. At the start of the morning prayers, we recite a wonderful formula as we prepare our kavanah (mental state): “I hereby ready my mouth to thank and praise my Creator.” With this short declaration, we ready ourselves to employ our mouth for a totally different form of speech. We prepare ourselves to employ the sublime speech that is rooted in the source of Divine wisdom. Since this discourse comes from the elevated speech which was used to create the universe, our prayers have the ability to influence the world and change its course (Olat Re’iyah vol. I, p. 192).

With this appreciation for the power of holy speech, we may understand why tzara’at only afflicts the Jewish people. Our faculty of elevated speech, based on the Divine speech which transcends the universe, can influence the world for good and for bad. When we misuse this great power, we damage the world and are held responsible. The affliction of tzara’at, and the process of purifying oneself from it, comes to repair this wrong. The verbal communication of other nations, however, comes from the realm of the physical universe. Since it lacks the power of elevated speech, they are not punished for its misuse.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe’iyah, pp. 295-296.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/METZORA_65.htm

Is there such a thing as Lashon Tov? (Tazria-Metzora 5777)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

The Sages understood tsara’at, the theme of this week’s parsha, not as an illness but as a miraculous public exposure of the sin of lashon hara, speaking badly about people. Judaism is a sustained meditation on the power of words to heal or

harm, mend or destroy. Just as God created the world with words, so we create, and can destroy, relationships with words.

The rabbis said much about lashon hara, but virtually nothing about the corollary, lashon tov, "good speech". The phrase does not appear in either the Babylonian Talmud or the Talmud Yerushalmi. It figures only in two midrashic passages where it refers to praising God. But lashon hara does not mean speaking badly about God. It means speaking badly about human beings. If it is a sin to speak badly about people, is it a mitzvah to speak well about them? My argument will be that it is, and to show this, let us take a journey through the sources.

In Mishnah Avot, Ethics of the Fathers (2:10-11), we read the following:

> *Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh.*
>
> *He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arakh: an ever-flowing spring.*

However, the practice of Rabban Yochanan in praising his disciples seems to stand in contradiction to a Talmudic principle:

> *Rav Dimi, brother of Rav Safra said: Let no one ever talk in praise of his neighbour, for praise will lead to criticism.* (Arakhin 16a)

Rashi gives two explanations of this statement. Having delivered excessive praise [yoter midai], the speaker himself will come to qualify his remarks, admitting for the sake of balance that the person of whom he speaks also has faults. Alternatively, others will point out his faults. For Rashi, the crucial consideration is, is the praise judicious, accurate, true, or it is overstated? If the former, it is permitted; if the latter, it is forbidden. Evidently Rabban Yochanan was careful not to exaggerate.

Rambam, however, sees matters differently. He writes: "Whoever speaks well about his neighbour in the presence of his enemies is guilty of a secondary form of evil speech [avak lashon hara], since he will provoke them to speak badly about him" (Hilkhot Deot 7:4). According to the Rambam the issue is not whether the praise is moderate or excessive, but the context in which it is delivered. If it is done in the presence of friends of the person about whom you are speaking, it is permitted. It is forbidden only when you are among his enemies and detractors. Praise then becomes a provocation, with bad consequences.

Are these merely two opinions or is there something deeper at stake? There is a famous passage in the Talmud which discusses how one should sing the praises of a bride at her wedding:

> *Our Rabbis taught: How should you dance before the bride [i.e. what should one sing]?*
>
> *The disciples of Hillel hold that at a wedding you should sing that the bride is beautiful, whether she is or not. Shammai's disciples disagree. Whatever the occasion, don't tell a lie. "Do you call that a lie?" the Hillelites respond. "In the eyes of the groom at least, the bride is beautiful."*

What's really at stake here is not just temperament – puritanical Shammaites versus good-natured Hillelites – but two views about the nature of language. The Shammaites think of language as a way of making statements, which are either true or false. The Hillelites understand that language is about more than making statements. We can use language to encourage, empathise, motivate and inspire. Or we can use it to discourage, disparage, criticise and depress. Language does more than convey information. It conveys emotion. It creates or disrupts a mood. The sensitive use of speech involves social and emotional intelligence. Language, in J. L. Austin's famous account, can be performative as well as informative.

The argument between Hillel and Shammai is similar to that between Rambam and Rashi. For Rashi, as for Shammai, the key question about praise is: is it true, or is it excessive? For Rambam as for Hillel, the question is: what is the context? Is it being said among enemies or friends? Will it create warmth and esteem or envy and resentment?

We can go one further, for the disagreement between Rashi and Rambam about praise may be related to a more fundamental disagreement about the nature of the command, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). Rashi interprets the command to mean: do not do to your neighbour what you would not wish him to do to you (Rashi to Sanhedrin 84b). Rambam, however, says that the command includes the duty "to speak in his praise" (Hilkhot Deot 6:3). Rashi evidently sees praise of one's neighbour as optional, while Rambam sees it as falling within the command of love.

We can now answer a question we should have asked at the outset about the Mishnah in Avot that speaks of Yochanan ben Zakkai's disciples. Avot is about ethics, not about history or biography. Why then does it tell us that Rabban Yochanan had disciples? That, surely, is a fact not a value, a piece of information not a guide to how to live.

However, we can now see that the Mishnah is telling us something profound indeed. The very first statement in Avot includes the principle: "Raise up many disciples." But how do you create disciples? How do you inspire people to become what they could become, to reach the full measure of their potential? Answer: By acting as did Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai when he praised his students, showing them their specific strengths.

He did not flatter them. He guided them to see their distinctive talents. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the "well that never loses a drop", was not creative but he had a remarkable memory – not unimportant in the days before the Oral Torah was written in books. Elazar ben Arakh, the "ever-flowing spring," was creative, but needed to be fed by mountain waters (years later he separated from his colleagues and forgot all he had learned).

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai took a Hillel-Rambam view of praise. He used it not so much to describe as to motivate. And that is lashon tov. Evil speech diminishes us, good speech helps us grow. Evil speech puts people down, good speech lifts them up. Focused, targeted praise, informed by considered judgment of individual strengths, and sustained by faith in people and their potentiality, is what makes teachers great and their disciples greater than they would otherwise have been. That is what we learn from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

So there is such a thing as lashon tov. According to Rambam it falls within the command of "Love your neighbour as yourself." According to Avot it is one way of "raising up many disciples." It is as creative as lashon hara is destructive.

Seeing the good in people and telling them so is a way of helping it become real, becoming a midwife to their personal growth. If so, then not only must we praise God. We must praise people too.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. *See* https://rabbisacks.org/thing-lashon-tov-tazria-metzora-5777/

Torah Thought: Ritual Impurity Nowadays

By Mrs. Chaya Mushka and Nechama Krimmer * © Chabad 2021

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Rebbe of Chabad, taught that a person must always "live with the times". This encourages us to not only tap into the unique energies of Shabbat and the Jewish Holidays, but also to find relevance in the weekly Torah portion and selective daily readings and how they relate to our ongoing lives, both as a community and as individuals.

Through the lense of this week'sdouble parsha, Tazria Metzora, we can gain insight into the unique time we are living in. Tazria Metzora discusses cases of ritual and spiritual impurity, most notably tzaras. Tzaras is often translated as leprosy, but this is a misnomer. Tzaras, a form of spiritual impurity caused by transgression or misdeeds, reveals itself physically, but, essentially, is a spiritual illness. Tzaras is specifically associated with lashonhara, negative speech, as the prophetess Miriam developed tzaras as a result of speaking ill against her brother, Moshe.

Unlike physical illnesses, tzaras not only could affect the skin of the metzora, the "leper," but also could reveal itself on his garments and the walls of his house, creating odd white spots and patches on infected areas. A kohen would be summoned to witness these spots and then he would instruct the leper what steps to follow to remove the spiritual impurity causing the illness, ultimately cleansing the leper of both tzaras and his transgressions.

In the first step towards purification, the leper was forced to leave his house, his neighborhood, and his community to a dwelling place outside the city limits. The Talmud explains that this exile was not to punish the leper, but was the conduit needed for the kind of reflection and personal introspection the leper needed to engage in that can only be accomplished in isolation.

While tzaras is no longer an illness we see today, we are living in the midst of another illness that can force us into isolation whether we want to be or not: Covid-19. Tzaras forced individuals out of their homes and communities until healing occurred, while Covid has forced us homeward and housebound also isolating us from our family, friends, and communities.

So what can we learn from this?

Throughout human history, fighting for physical survival was man's greatest struggle. Acquiring shelter. Acquiring food. Man against nature and man against man.
Today, however, in a time of creature comforts, of suburbs, cars, airplanes, dishwashers, washing machines, surplus food and clothing, rokus and smartphones, our struggles have evolved and turned inward.

Our primary struggle is not man against nature or man against man as it was in the past. The struggle is now man against self, man's search for meaning. We ask ourselves constantly: What do I need to do to be happy? Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? We ask ourselves these questions in solitude and on sleepless nights. In isolation. And now, mandated by health officials to "stay safe, stay home," this sense of isolation is palpable.

Although introverts and urban hermits may have adjusted to this new world, many others feel the weight of unwanted solitude and loneliness. Or even confinement behind the fabric of a mask.

In this unprecedented time in history, however, we have a chance to analyze with clearer vision what is most important to us, what things in our lives hold meaning and what do not, what we can live with and what we can't live without. We have the opportunity to change how we see and process the world, similar to the leper, in his forced isolation away from home and community.

Perhaps we have used this time to develop a new appreciation for our friends and family, who we look to for strength, compassion, and inspiration. Perhaps we have learned not to take our loved ones for granted. Perhaps we have utilized this time to start projects and activities we have always wanted to try or perhaps we have turned to Hashem in prayer for the healing of ourselves, our loved ones, and the planet.

Covid may have taken us inside, but it also may have helped us turn our hearts outward, to our concern for others and to our relationship with Hashem.

Similar to tzaras, our physical health is greatly impacted by our mental, emotional, and spiritual lives. By working on ourselves, nourishing our relationships with others, and increasing our efforts in Torah and Mitzvot, we can physically change the world. One deed at a time.

We have just entered the Hebrew month of Iyar, an acronym for "Ani Hashem Refuecha," I am Hashem, your Healer. As Iyar promises, may this month bring physical, emotional, and spiritual healing to ourselves, our families, and the world and the revelation of the True Healer through the coming of Moshiach and the ushering in of the Messianic Era, when we will no longer know loneliness, sickness, or death.

* From Chabad of Greater Dayton, OH.

Tazria-Metzora: Looking at Others Positively

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Only a priest was empowered to declare a person, article of clothing, or house afflicted with spiritual leprosy — tzara'at or free of it. (Leviticus 13:55-59)

The Torah specifically requires the priests to judge cases of tzara'at because they are the spiritual heirs of the very first priest, Aaron, who was famous for promoting brotherly love among the Jewish people. Because of their love for their fellow Jews, the priests—while taking care not to bend the law of the Torah in any way — will make absolutely sure that the law indeed requires them to pronounce the sufferer defiled before doing so. And if the priests do have to declare a person defiled, they will do whatever it takes to declare him undefiled at the earliest possible opportunity.

Similarly, when we encounter someone who appears to be afflicted with some negative character trait, we should not rush to reject him. Rather, we should first examine ourselves, in order to determine how well we exemplify the ideals of brotherly love. If we are in any way lacking in this regard, we have no right to pass judgment on others, for it could well be that our perception is skewed by our unrefined feelings.

By learning from Aaron how to love our fellows regardless of their objective behavior, we counteract the cause of our present exile, unwarranted hatred. This will hasten the final, Messianic Redemption.

– * from Daily Wisdom #1

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Likutei *Divrei* Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Volume 27, Issue 26 **Shabbat Parashat Tazria-Metzora** **5781 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

How to Praise

The Sages were eloquent on the subject of lashon hara, evil speech, the sin they took to be the cause of tsara'at. But there is a meta-halachic principle: "From the negative you can infer the positive"[1] So, for example, from the seriousness of the prohibition against Chillul Hashem, desecrating God's name, one can infer the importance of the opposite, Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying God's name.

It therefore follows that alongside the grave sin of lashon hara, there must in principle be a concept of lashon hatov, good speech, and it must be more than a mere negation of its opposite. The way to avoid lashon hara is to practise silence, and indeed the Sages were eloquent on the important of silence.[2] Silence saves us from evil speech but in and of itself it achieves nothing positive. What then is lashon hatov?

One of the most important tasks of a leader, a parent or a friend is focused praise. We first discussed this idea in parshat Vayeshev, where we examined the classic text on this – a Mishnah in Tractate Avot (2:11) in which Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai enumerates the praises of his five beloved students:

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arach: an ever-flowing spring.

Every Rabbi had disciples. The imperative, "Raise up many disciples"[3] is one of the oldest rabbinic teachings on record. What the Mishnah is telling us here is how to create disciples. It is not difficult to create followers. Often a good teacher will, over time, notice that they have developed a large following, students who are uncritical devotees – but how to encourage these followers to become creative intellects in their own right? It is far harder to create leaders than to create followers.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was a great teacher because five of his students became giants in their own right. The Mishnah is telling us how he did it: with focussed praise. He showed each of his pupils where their particular strength lay. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the "plastered well that never loses a drop," was gifted with a superb memory – an important ability in an age in which manuscripts were rare and the Oral Law was not yet committed to writing. Shimon ben Netanel, the "man who fears sin," may not have had the intellectual brilliance of the others but his reverential nature was a reminder to others that they were not merely scholars but also holy men engaged in a sacred task. Elazar ben Arach, the "ever-flowing spring," had a creative mind constantly giving rise to new interpretations of ancient texts.

I discovered the transformative power of focused praise from one of the more remarkable people I ever met, the late Lena Rustin. Lena was a speech therapist, specialising in helping children who struggled with stammers. I came to know her through a television documentary I was making for the BBC about the state of the family in Britain. Lena believed that the young children she was treating – they were, on average, around five years old – had to be understood in the context of their families. Families tend to develop an equilibrium. If a child stammers, everyone in the family adjusts to it. Therefore if the child is to lose their stammer, all the relationships within the family will have to be renegotiated. Not only must the child change. So must everyone else.

By and large, we tend to resist change. We settle into patterns of behaviour as they become more and more comfortable, like a well-used armchair or a well-worn pair of shoes. How do you create an atmosphere within a family that encourages change and makes it unthreatening? The answer Lena discovered was praise. She told the families with whom she was working that every day they must notice each member of the family doing something right, and say so – specifically, positively and thankfully.

She did not go into deep explanations, but watching her at work I began to realise what she was doing. She was creating, within each home, an atmosphere of mutual regard and continuous positive reinforcement. She wanted the parents to shape an environment of self-respect and self-confidence, not just for the stammering child but for every member of the family, so that the entire atmosphere of the home was one in which people felt safe to change and help others to do so.

I suddenly realised that Lena had discovered a solution not just for stammering but for group dynamics as a whole. My intuition was soon confirmed in a surprising way. There had been tensions among the television crew with which I had been working. Various things had gone wrong and there was an atmosphere of mutual recrimination. After filming a session of Lena Rustin teaching parents how to give and receive praise, the crew likewise began praising one another. Instantly the atmosphere was transformed. The tension dissolved, and filming became fun again. Praise gives people the confidence to let go of the negative aspects of their character and reach their full potential.

There is in praise a deep spiritual message too. We think religion is about faith in God. What I had not fully understood before was that faith in God should lead us to have faith in people, for God's image is in each of us, and we have to learn how to discern it. I then understood that the repeated phrase in Genesis 1, "And God saw that it was good," was there to teach us to see the good in people and events, and by so doing, help to strengthen that goodness. I also understood why God briefly punished Moses by turning his hand to tsara'at – because he had said about the Israelites, "They will not believe in me." (Ex. 4:1) Moses was being taught a fundamental lesson of leadership: It does not matter whether they believe in you. What matters is that you believe in them.

It was from another wise woman that I learned another important lesson about praise. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck, in her book Mindset[4], argues that it makes a decisive difference whether we believe that our abilities are innate and determined once and for all (the "fixed" mindset), or whether we may assume that talent is something we achieve through time by effort, practice and persistence (the "growth" mindset). People who take the former approach tend to be risk-averse, afraid that if they fail this will show that they are not as good as they were thought to be. The latter group embrace risk because they take failure as a learning experience from which they can grow. It follows that there is good praise and bad praise. Parents and teachers should not praise children in absolute terms: "You are gifted, brilliant, a star!" They should praise effort: "You tried hard, you gave of your best, and I can see the improvement!" They should encourage a growth mindset, not a fixed one.

Perhaps this explains a sad aftermath in the life of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's two most gifted pupils. The Mishnah immediately following the one quoted above states:

He [Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai] used to say: If all the Sages of Israel were in one scale of a balance and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus in the other, he would outweigh them all. However, Abba Saul said in his name: If all the Sages of

Israel, including Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, were in one scale of a balance, and Elazar ben Arach in the other, he would outweigh them all. (Avot 2:12)

Tragically, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was eventually excommunicated by his colleagues for failing to accept the majority view on a matter of Jewish law.[5] As for Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, he became separated from his colleagues. When they went to the academy at Yavneh, he went to Emmaus, a pleasant place to live but lacking in other Torah scholars. Eventually he forgot his learning and became a pale shadow of his former self.[6] It may be that praising his students for their innate abilities rather than their effort, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai inadvertently encouraged his two most talented students to develop a fixed mindset rather than engage with colleagues and stay open to intellectual growth.

Praise, and how we administer it, is a fundamental element in leadership of any kind. Recognising the good in people and saying so, we help bring people's potential to fruition. Praising their efforts rather than their innate gifts helps encourage growth, about which Hillel used to say: "He who does not increase his knowledge, loses it" (Mishnah Avot 1:13). The right kind of praise changes lives. That is the power of lashon hatov. Bad speech diminishes us; good speech can lift us to great heights. Or as W. H. Auden said in one of his beautiful poems:

In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.[7]

[1] Nedarim 11a.
[2] See for example Mishnah Avot 1:17; 3:13.
[3] Mishnah Avot 1:1.
[4] Carol Dweck, Mindset, Ballantine Books, 2007.
[5] Bava Metzia 59b.
[6] Shabbat 147b.
[7] W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," Another Time (New York: Random House, 1940).

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." (Leviticus 12:3) The mitzva of circumcision in the portion of Tazria appears in the midst of the discussion of the impure and pure periods immediately following childbirth. Furthermore, our Sages specifically derive from this ordinance that the ritual of circumcision overrides Shabbat: "'On the eighth day, [the child's] foreskin shall be circumcised' – even if it occurs on Shabbat" [Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 132a]. Why express this crucial significance of circumcision – its precedence even over Shabbat – within the context of ritual impurity? What is the connection?

Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel links the two issues by interpreting: "And on the eighth day, when [Biblically] she is permitted [to have sexual relations with her husband], on that [day] is [the baby] to be circumcised." He is thereby citing the view of our Sages, who understand that the circumcision must be on the eighth day following the birth "so that everyone not be happy while the parents will be sad" if they cannot properly express their affection toward one another [Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Nidda 31b].

I would like to suggest an additional connection. When a woman is in a state of ritual impurity, she and her husband are forbidden from engaging in sexual relations until she immerses in a mikveh (ritual bath). Obviously this restriction demands a great deal of self-control and inner discipline. The major symbol that graphically expresses the importance of mastering one's physical instincts is the command of circumcision: even the sexual organ itself, the physical manifestation of the male potency and the unbridled id, must be tempered and sanctified by the stamp of the Divine.

A well-known midrash takes this even one step further: Turnus Rufus the Wicked once asked Rabbi Akiva: "Whose works are better, the works of God or the works of human beings?" He answered him, "The works of human beings…" [Turnus Rufus] said to him, "Why do you circumcise?" [Rabbi Akiva] said, "I knew you were asking about that, and therefore I anticipated [the question] and told you that the works of human beings are better."

Turnus Rufus said to him: "But if God wants men to be circumcised, why does He not see to it that male babies are born already circumcised?" Rabbi Akiva said to him, "It is because the Holy One Blessed be He only gave the commandments to Israel so that we may be purified through them." [Midrash Tanĥuma, Tazria, 5]

I see in the words of the midrash as well as the context of the commandment a profound message: the human being is part of the physical creation of the world, a world that is subject to scientific rules of health and illness, life and death. The most obvious and tragic expression of our physicality is that, in line with all creatures of the universe, we humans as well are doomed to be born, disintegrate and die. And therefore the most radical example of ritual impurity is a human corpse, avi avot hatuma.

However, an animal carcass, a dead reptile, and the blood of the menstrual cycle (fall-out of the failed potential of fertilization) likewise cause ritual impurity. A woman in childbirth has a very close brush with death – both in terms of her own mortality as well as during the painful anguished period preceding the moment when she hears the cry of a healthy, living baby.

God's gift to the human being created in the Divine image, however, is that in addition to physicality there is also spirituality, in addition to death there is also life eternal, in addition to ritual impurity (tuma) there is also ritual purity (tahara). Hence, the very human life that emerges from the mother's womb brings in its wake not only the brush with death, tuma, but also the hope of new life, tahara – and while the tuma is for seven days, the tahara is for thirty-three! The human being has the power to overcome his physical impediments and imperfections, to ennoble and sanctify his animal drives and instincts, to perfect human nature and redeem an imperfect world.

This is the message that Rabbi Akiva attempted to convey to Turnus Rufus the Wicked. Yes, the world created by the Almighty is beautiful and magnificent, but it is also imperfect and incomplete. God has given the task of completion and redemption to the human being, who has the ability and capacity to circumcise himself, to sublimate his "sub-gartelian" (beneath the gartel, or belt) drives, to sanctify society and to complete the cosmos. Indeed, the works of the human being are greater! And the command of circumcision belongs within the context of impurity and purity.

And this is also the meaning behind the principle that circumcision overrides Shabbat: the Sabbath testifies to God's creation of the world – impressive and inspiring, but deliberately imperfect. Circumcision testifies to the human being's challenge to redeem himself and perfect the world. Indeed, circumcision overrides Shabbat.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Going At It Alone

"No man is an island." "It takes a village." These are just some of the clichés that are used to convey the importance of social groups, of the realization that people cannot "go at it alone".

But just as it is vital that each of us learns that we are ultimately limited in what we can accomplish by ourselves, it is equally vital that we learn of the benefits of occasional solitude and of the need to sometimes just be alone.

In this week's double Torah portion, Tazria-Metzora, we read at length and in great detail about an individual who is afflicted by a condition known as tzara'at, often translated as leprosy. It is a condition which is characterized by specific discolorations of the skin and which is understood by our sages to be the consequence of immoral behavior, particularly malicious gossip.

The Torah prescribes that such an individual rend his clothes and let his hair grow. He is considered ritually unclean, and "... he shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside that camp." (Leviticus 13:46)

Opinions vary as to why he must be removed from society. Some say simply that he is

quarantined because his condition is contagious. Others insist that since his misdeeds caused harm to others, he must be punished by living apart from others.

I prefer, however, the view that believes that a period of solitude is imposed upon this individual to afford him an opportunity to think, to reconsider his actions, and to resolve to live a new moral life style. He is afforded the social isolation necessary for thoroughgoing introspection, a chance to think for himself.

There is a lesson here about the benefits of solitude that is of renewed relevance in our day and age.

Some years ago, The American Scholar (Spring 2010) carried an essay by William Deresiewicz which he delivered to the plebe class at the United States Military Academy at West Point. The essay is entitled "Solitude and Leadership."

Mr. Deresiewicz eloquently conveys the message to these future military leaders that leadership demands a mindset which can only come about with frequent and sustained periods of solitude.

He emphasizes the importance of thinking and writes, “Thinking means concentrating on one thing long enough to develop an idea about it.”

He further emphasizes the importance of concentrating, and writes that it means “gathering yourself together into a single point rather than letting yourself be dispersed everywhere into a cloud of electronic and social input.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson made Mr. Deresiewicz's point long ago when he said, “He who should inspire and lead his race must be defended from traveling with the souls of other men, from living, breathing, reading, and writing in the daily, time-worn yoke of their opinions."

These opinions of a famous 19th century essayist and one of his contemporary counterparts stress and amplify a message implicit in this week's Torah portion. The message is that time by oneself, reflecting and engaging in serious introspection, is an essential component of self improvement and a prerequisite not only for membership in society, but for leadership of society.

Jewish sources go much further than Emerson and Deresiewicz. The latter restrict their insightful comments to the importance of solitude in everyday, mundane affairs. Our tradition goes beyond that and teaches that solitude is necessary for spiritual growth and for religious leadership.

The sages of the Talmud insist upon the necessity of cheshbon hanefesh self-reckoning. The Jewish ethical treatises of medieval times recommend that one regularly withdraw from society to engage in such self reckoning. Chassidim, and most particularly the followers of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, daily engage in periods of hitbodedut, solitary contemplation.

The secular writers quoted above are helpful in that they make it clear that solitude need not entail mystical practices or spiritual techniques. Rather, solitude provides an opportunity for thinking on one’s own and for concentrating deeply without the undue influences of one's social surround.

I personally am convinced that occasional solitude would be a healthy antidote to the blind conformity which is imposed upon all of us by our contemporary world.

Once again, the Torah, in the midst of a passage which seems most out of tune with modernity, gives us a lesson essential for coping with modernity.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

A Frightening Idea by the Chovos Ha’Levovos et al

There is a very difficult Medrash on this week’s parsha that I have spoken about in previous years. Tonight I would like to offer an interpretation of this Medrash that I heard in a shiur from Rav Isaac Bernstein, ob”m. Rav Bernstein, in turn, was quoting an insight he saw in a sefer entitled Kosnos Ohr, authored by a grandson of the Panim Meiros.

The Medrash tells the story of a peddler who went from town to town in the vicinity of the city of Tzippori, selling his wares. He used to call out, “Who wants to buy the elixir of life?” Rav Yannai, the Talmudic sage, was sitting there, and he heard the peddler’s sales-pitch. Rav Yannai said, “Sell me the elixir!” The peddler said, “You, and people like you, do not need what I am selling.” Rav Yannai persisted and said, “But, nu – tell me. What are you selling?”

The Medrash continues that the peddler took out a volume of Tehillim and showed Rav Yannai the pasuk “Who is the man who wants life…? Guard your tounge from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good…” [Tehillim 34:13-15]. These famous pesukim from Psalms pose the question – what is best way to guarantee life? The pasuk suggests the answer: Watch your tongue!

The Medrash concludes that Rav Yannai proclaimed, “My entire life I have been reading these pesukim and did not understand what they were teaching, until this peddler came along and informed me as to their meaning.”

The question is obvious: What did the peddler tell Rav Yannai that he did not previously understand? Certainly, Rav Yannai knew how to translate a pasuk in Tanach. The interpretation of these words is straightforward: “Who is the man who desires life? Guard your tongue from (speaking) evil.” Rav Yannai claims that he never understood what the pesukim meant until now. How is that possible? What novel interpretation did the peddler provide?

The Kosnos Ohr references a very frightening passage in the sefer Chovos Ha’Levovos (“Duties of the Heart” by Bachye ibn Pakuda). The truth of the matter is that this idea is not only in the Chovos Ha’Levovos, but it also appears in the Maggid Meisharim (which relates conversations between a Malach and the Beis Yosef – Divine Revelations, as it were, communicated to Rav Yosef Karo by an Angel). The same idea appears a third time in the sefer Marpeh Lashon by Rav Raphael Hamburger. It is a very frightening thought.

The Chovos Ha’Levovos writes in the “Gates of Acquisition” (Chapter 7) that when Reuven speaks Lashon Ha’Rah about Shimon, Reuven’s (prior) mitzvos are transferred to Shimon and Shimon’s (prior) sins are transferred to Revuen! Slanderers will find on the Day of Judgement that they will not be receiving reward for good deeds that they did do, and will—on the contrary—receive punishment for bad deeds which they did not do!

A person who had been a Shomer Shabbos his entire life will ascend to the World of Truth and he will suddenly discover that he is not receiving any credit for his Sabbath observance! On the other hand, he will be punished for sins that he never committed. When he will express astonishment at this apparent injustice, it will be explained to him that his spiritual rewards and punishments have been switched with those of so-and-so, against whom he spoke Lashon Ha’Rah.

The Chovos Ha’Levovos cites an incident involving someone about whom Lashon Ha’Rah was spoken. Shimon heard that Reuven spoke Lashon Ha’Rah about him. Shimon then sent Reuven a fruit basket as a present. Shimon told him: “You did me such a favor, so I feel that I need to repay it!” Reuven asked “What did I do for you?” Shimon responded, “You spoke Lashon Ha’Rah about me. Therefore, I received all of your merits. This is a tremendous present! It is only right that I should send you a present in return.”

Like all great people in Jewish history who did something revolutionary, Rav Yosef Karo was attacked by people for his revolutionary accomplishment—the writing of the Shulchan Aruch. People spoke Lashon Ha’Rah against him. The Malach told the Beis Yosef (and this is recorded in the Maggid Meisharim) that he should not worry about the Lashon Ha’Rah because he would get the zechusim (merits) of the people who slandered him, and all of his Aveiros (sins) would be transferred to those other people!

Rav Raphael Hamburger, in his Sefer Marpeh Lashon, writes that many people will come to the World of Truth and find many positive mitzvos in "their ledger" that they never did. They will tell the "Gate Keepers," we never did these mitzvos, and they will be told, "they were done by people who slandered you!"

The Kosnos Ohr says that this idea is the novelty that Rav Yannai did not understand. When Rav Yannai learned the pasuk in Tehillim "Who is the man who desires life…" he thought that this was speaking about (life in) this world. The epiphany that he had because of the peddler's insight was that the pasuk is teaching, "If you want life in the next world, the best way to achieve that is by guarding your tongue from speaking evil. If you work your whole life—you meticulously do mitzvos, keep Shabbos, are a baal chessed, and (after 120 years) you want to reap the rewards for all your efforts, the only way to guarantee that the reward of this "good life" will be preserved for you is to guard your tongue from speaking evil. Otherwise—according to the Chovos Ha'Levovos et al—a person can lose his mitzvos and lose his reward. He can, Heaven forbid, wind up with aveiros that he did not do and with mitzvos that were lost!

This is the "chiddush" that Rav Yannai now learned.

Rav Bernstein writes that the Chofetz Chaim brings this idea in the Sefer Shmiras Ha'Lashon Chapter 3. He writes that there is a footnote by the Chofetz Chaim (which I could not find; I assume he had a different edition). Many people at the end of Shemoneh Esrei recite a Biblical pasuk that begins with the first letter of their name and ends with the last letter of their name. Many Siddurim have a list of suggested pesukim for many different names. The Shaloh ha'Kadosh writes that the reason we say such a pasuk is that on the Day of Judgement everyone will be asked his or her name. If someone forgets his name (as a result of the trauma of the death experience), at least he will remember the pasuk which he has recited so many thousands of times in his life.

This is a curious Shaloh. Am I going to forget my name? I forget many things these days, but I still remember my name. So, what does this mean?

Rav Bernstein explains: When someone goes to Heaven and suddenly, he is credited with a whole range of mitzvos that he well knows he never performed in his lifetime, he will recognize that this is Chaim ben Yosef's mitzvos and these are Shmuel ben Shalom's mitzvos and these are Dovid ben Tzvi's mitzvos. He will have credited to his account hundreds—maybe thousands—of mitzvos from different people. They will call him Dovid ben Tzvi; they will call him Shmuel ben Shalom; they will call him Chaim ben Yosef. He will become so confused! "Who am I really?" The Shaloh therefore says that if he has a pasuk containing the first and last letter of his name firmly engraved in his self-conscious, that is how he will remember his real name.

This is all based on the above-mentioned Chovos Ha'Levovos.

My point with all this is to impress on the audience—and on myself—the severity of the transgression of speaking Lashon Ha'Rah . If this Chovos Ha'Levovos and Maggid Meisharim and Marpeh Lashon do not put the fear of G-d into you, nothing will. The specter of going up to the World of Truth and suddenly discovering that you have lost your hard-earned reward for doing mitzvos is frightening.

The problem is, in my humble opinion, that this idea is too frightening. How can it be that a person works to accumulate Torah and mitzvos his whole life, and then they not be there for him in the World of Truth? It is too frightening.

Rav Dessler has a long essay (which I do not have time to go into now) explaining that this is not really what the Chovos Ha'Levovos means. He certainly does not take it at face value.

I would like to point out that we also see an inference (diyuk) in the sefer Marpeh Lashon from Rav Raphael Hamburger that might also limit this concept. He formulates this concept by adding two very important words. He says "we see that one who is immersed, Heaven forbid, in this evil practice…" This means we are talking about a person for whom this is his nature. He is what is called in halacha a Ba'al Lashon Ha'Rah (literally, a "master of slander").

In my humble opinion, this Chovos Ha'Levovos, et al, only applies to a person who is a Ba'al Lashon Ha'Rah—a person who is constantly speaking slander. I am not here to minimize the prohibition. However, if a person stumbles (as we all do from time to time in this most difficult area of observance), I do not know if the Chovovos Ha'Levovos really means to in fact say, "Well, you have lost all your mitzvos and you get all of his aveiros."

They certainly meant this teaching to be a motivator for improvement in this area, but I believe it is too scary to accept it totally on its face value. In my humble opinion, the words of Rav Raphael Hamburger, who brings this fundamental idea should be analyzed carefully for their nuance: It applies only to one who is "mutbah" (immersed), Chas V'Shalom in this evil character trait—a person who is constantly speaking bad about others with delight and enthusiasm, without having the slightest pangs of guilt or remorse. It is – I feel – only this "Master of Slander" (Ba'al Lashon Ha'Rah) about which this very dramatic theology of transfer of mitzvos and aveiros might apply.

Still, the take home message from all this is: "Don't speak Lashon Ha'Rah ."

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Where in the Torah do you find an example of purposeful isolation? Where in the Torah do you find an example of purposeful isolation? It is in Parshat Tazriah which appears alongside Parshat Metzorah this Shabbat.

The Torah presents us with the laws of the Metzorah – a 'leper', someone who is guilty of slandering others. Chazal explain that the term 'metzorah' is derived from the words 'Motzei Sheim Ra'. 'He has created a bad name for others'. So what is the punishment for the Metzorah? The Torah tells us "badad yesheiv michutz lamachane" – "He must dwell alone, his place of habitation will be outside the camp".

Rashi brings the gemara in Mesechet Arachit Daf 16B. There Chazal tell us that the Metzorah has been guilty of causing husbands to separate from wives and people to separate from their friends therefore he now should be separated from society. This is one of the outstanding examples of corrective punishment in the Torah. The hope is that as a result of tasting isolation himself, the Metzorah, at the end of his period of being impure, will re-emerge into society now to be a responsible person. It is clear that the Torah views isolation as being an unhealthy state of existence. That is why in Sefer Bereshit we are told "Lo tov lehiyot adam levado" "it is not good for a person to be by themselves". And I wonder, is the English word 'bad' derived from the word 'badad' because it is not good to be alone?

During this period of the coronavirus, so many of us are isolated. And we're getting through this, knowing that it is for a good purpose: to look after our own health and the lives of those around us.

Unlike in biblical times, when isolation meant absolute isolation. Today, those who are isolated can and should be in touch with others. And it is a mitzvah to get in touch with those around you – particularly those living by themselves – on the phone, by email and through whichever way possible. Those of us able to get out of our homes, can stand outside the homes of others and speak to them through the window or be in touch, be connected. Because it is tough to be alone right now.

May Hashem bless us and all of our society that when we eventually emerge from isolation we will come back into a society which will be responsible, which will be happy and most importantly of all be healthy.

OTS Dvar Torah

Rabbanit Rivky Yisraeli

Is it Bad to be Impure?

Purity (tahara) and impurity (tum'ah) are manifestations of a routine relationship between man and his Creator. As it turns out, the distance that creates impurity has a role that we ought to exploit.

The Book of Leviticus, or Torat Hacohanim, as it is also called, deals mainly with issues tied to the Beit HaMikdash and the Temple service. One is required to be in a state of taraha, purity, to enter the Temple, perform the Temple rites, and partake of the offerings.

In the parshiot we have read in the past few weeks, we can find a list of impurities applying to both men and women (except for those who become impure through contact with a dead body, a subject covered in a different parasha). Let's try to thoroughly understand what tahara and tum'ah truly mean, and how they tie into our current reality.

Six types of impurity appear in the list of impure individuals that begins in Parashat Tazria, and continues until the end of Parashat Metzora:

The Impurity of a New Mother (Leviticus 12:2-5): "When a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be unclean seven days… If she bears a female, she shall be unclean two weeks…"

The Impurity of a Leper (ibid., 13:2-3): "When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of his body… when the priest sees it, he shall pronounce him unclean."

The Impurity of a Man who had an abnormal Seminal Discharge (ibid. 15:1): "When any man has a discharge issuing from his member, he is unclean."

The Impurity of a Man who had a normal Seminal Discharge (ibid., 15:16): "When a man has an emission of semen, he shall… remain unclean until evening."

Menstrual Tum'ah (nidah) (ibid, 15:19): "When a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood from her body, she shall remain in her impurity seven days; whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening."

The Impurity of a Zavah (a woman with an abnormal vaginal discharge (ibid. 15:25): "When a woman has had a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or when she has a discharge beyond her period of impurity, she shall be unclean, as though at the time of her impurity, as long as her discharge lasts."

When we review this list, we discover some intriguing things:

There are impurities like the impurity of a new mother, the impurity of Ba'al Keri and menstrual impurity, which are all completely normal phenomena experienced by healthy individuals. Other types of impurities are expressions of sicknesses, such as the impurity of a leper, the impurity of a zav, and the impurity of a zavah. In other words, impurity isn't necessarily negative.

Impurity isn't gender specific. Sometimes, only men experience it (as in the case of a ba'al keri and a zav) and at other times, only women do (as in the case of a new mother, menstrual impurity, and zavah). Some impurities can be experienced by both genders, as in the case of a leper. In any case, though, impurity can be transferred from a woman to a man, or from a man to a woman, through physical contact and/or sexual intimacy.

Becoming impure is not a transgression. In fact, no one can be commanded to refrain from becoming impure, since in most cases, if not all of the cases, people don't become impure out of choice. Still, certain restrictions are imposed on people who have become impure: they are prohibited from entering the Temple or eating the meat of a Temple sacrifice.

All individuals, regardless of their personality or standing, are subject to becoming impure. At times, they will be pure, and at others, they will be impure. On the one hand, no individual can always be pure, while on the other hand, all individuals can potentially transition from a state of impurity to a state of purity.

What is the significance of purity and impurity?

An impure individual is kept at a certain distance from the Hashem because he or she can't observe anything that expresses a physical proximity to Him (such as entering the Beit HaMikdash, making a sacrificial offering, or partaking in the eating of sacrificial meat). Is this a bad thing? Not necessarily. This parasha intends to teach us about a person's natural state in the world, and the relationship between a person and his or her Creator. During the course of his or her life, this relationship oscillates between proximity and remoteness, a sort of "spiritual coming and going". Sometimes, a person stays close, at other times, the person stays away. When the person is at a distance, he or she eagerly awaits the opportunity to become pure and become closer to Hashem, once more. When the person is pure and closer to Hashem, he or she knows that this state won't last forever. It's temporary – until the person becomes impure again. The value of proximity is founded on the dynamic relationship between proximity and remoteness, and the yearning for a renewed closeness.

As such, purity (tahara) and impurity (tum'ah) are manifestations of a routine relationship between man and his Creator. It is a relationship that expresses the dynamism and flux that create a deeper meaning and allow us to connect to that deeper meaning. People need to know that distance and alienation have a bearing on their relationship with the Creator of the Universe (and apparently, any relationship, be it a relationship between spouses or between any two individuals). There is no need to dread this distance or get worked up about it. We need to keep in mind that distance has a role to play, and that we can take advantage of this distance to engage in deep study and achieve a profound understanding of the meaning of that relationship.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Tons of Love

And the person with Tzaraas, in whom there is the lesion, his garments shall be torn, his head shall be unshorn, he shall cover himself down to his mustache and call out, "Unclean! Unclean!"

All the days the lesion is upon him, he shall remain unclean. He is unclean; he shall dwell isolated; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Vayikra 13:45-46)

These are very harsh conditions for the Metzora to endure. Yes, he spoke Loshon Hora and he was the cause that people became separated from each other and this is his just repayment "Mida Knegged Mida" – measure for measure. However, isolation is severe. The toughest punishment a prisoner can receive is solitary confinement. That breaks a person more than physical privation. To be cut off from society is a huge dose of Din – Judgement!

Even if the goal is to get him to recognize "the evil of his ways" and to mend his behavior, it may just drive him further away in the end. I know too many examples of people who reacted negatively to punishment, not realizing it was tough love, and as a result they ran even further away. Therefore, it may be important for the Metzora, the isolated one, sitting alone in quarantine, to understand that he finds himself in a setting that is not a purely punitive.

This I heard from one of my holy Rebbeim, Rabbi Ezriel Tauber ztl. Every situation in life has an admixture of DIN- Judgment, Rachamim – Mercy, and Chessed – Kindliness! How so!? Chaim just finished an inspired Davening and now he's driving to work on the West Side Highway. He's on his way to an important early morning meeting. Traffic is flowing swimmingly and the weather is fair and it looks like all systems are humming perfectly. Chaim is listening to a Daf HaYomi Shiur and life could not be better.

Suddenly, flub flub flub, his right front tire blows out and he puts on his yellow blinkers as he crawls in the right lane looking for a place to pull over. By the time he reaches the rare cut

out area which qualifies for a shoulder on the road he has terribly torn up the tire and maybe ruined the rim too. He calls roadside service, AAA or Oy Oy Oy, and they tell him that help is on the way and will be there in 45 minutes. Now he will miss that important meeting. His boss will be upset.

Now let's examine this situation using these three lenses of Din, Rachamim, and Chessed. The obvious Din is that he out the price of tire and he has some repairing to do at work. What had he done to deserve this!? I don't thing anyone can say for sure. Maybe something terrible! Maybe nothing at all!

The Rachamim in this scene is that perhaps this was just a slap on the wrist in comparison to what he truly deserved. No one can be certain, but Boruch HASHEM it was his tire and not his car or him that was damaged or lost. He found a rare shoulder spot on the road. He is sitting in a safe place. He has road side service. He's been spared, because he has a spare. He has only to wait 45 minutes and all will be well again very soon.

The Chessed in the scenario is he's alive. He can breathe. At that very time his wife is doing carpool and taking their two healthy children to school. He has time to listen more carefully to his Daf HaYomi Shiur. This list is actually endless.

Employing these three ways of seeing each situation can free the person from obsessing on a "woe is me" and "why me" attitude and allow them to see that what looks like a punishment is really a hug. The Talmud says, "Push away with the left and draw close with the right!" The standard understanding is that the left is weaker than the right and the pushing away is only to draw even closer. I heard an alternative explanation that if you do both the pushing away and the drawing close at the same time you turn the person, and that slightly new perspective can help them understand that in the tough is tons of love.

Dvar Torah
Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm

God, Man, and State

The conjunction of the two sidrot we read today, Tazria and Metzora, is remarkable. The first speaks of birth, the second of a kind of death (a leper is considered partially dead; see Nedarim 64b). Tazria describes the joyous acceptance into the fold of a new Jew by means of brit mila, circumcision, while Metzora tells of the expulsion of the leper from the community.

Yet, these two portions are read on the same Shabbat with no interruption between them. The tension between these two opposites, this dialectic between birth and death, between pleasure and plague, between rejoicing and rejecting, speaks to us about the human condition as such and the existence of the Jew specifically. Even more, this tension contains fundamental teachings of Judaism that are relevant to the problems of the State of Israel whose eighteenth birthday we shall be celebrating this Monday.

After delineating the laws of childbirth, the Torah in the first sidra gives us the laws of circumcision. The Midrash Tanhuma (Tazria 7) relates a fascinating conversation concerning this Jewish law. We are told that Turnus Rufus, a particularly vicious Roman commander during the Hadrianic persecutions in Palestine, spoke to Rabbi Akiva, the revered leader of our people. He asked Rabbi Akiva: "Which is more beautiful: the work of God or the work of man?" Rabbi Akiva answered: "The work of man." Turnus Rufus was visibly disturbed by the answer. He continued: "Why do you circumcise your children?" Rabbi Akiva said: "My first reply serves as an answer to this question as well." Whereupon Rabbi Akiva brought before the Roman commander stalks of wheat and loaves of good white bread. He said to the Roman: "Behold, these are the works of God, and these are the works of man. Are not the works of man more beautiful and useful?" Said the Roman to Rabbi Akiva: "But if God wants people to be circumcised why are they not born circumcised?" Rabbi Akiva replied: "God gave the mitzvot to Israel letzaref bahen, to temper or purify His people thereby."

Here is the triumphant Roman commander, activist, arrogant, proud, and power-drunk. In an attitude of contempt, he faces the aged Jewish leader of this conquered people, a man who proclaims that the greatest principle of life is the study of Torah. What can these otherworldly mystics know about the world, about reality, about life? So he taunts the old rabbi: How come you circumcise your children? Do you not believe that man, as God's creation, is already born perfect?

But the Roman pagan is amazed by the response: No! All of Judaism – its philosophy, its Torah, its mitzvot – is based upon the premise that God withheld perfection from His creation, that He only began the task and left it to man, His tzellem, His image, to complete. In Genesis 2:3, we are taught that God rested from creating the world "which God created to do" – and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch interpreted that to mean that God created the world for man "to do." Therefore, Rabbi Akiva shows Turnus Rufus the wheat stalks and the white breads to teach him that God has created wheat because He wants man to do something with it. It is God's will that human beings make the created world more beautiful and more perfect. No wonder that in the Jewish view science and technology play such a positive role. No wonder that religious Jewry has contributed so mightily, throughout the ages and today as well, to the advancement of science and the control of nature.

Therefore, too, the mitzvot, and especially circumcision, were revealed to Israel to teach that people must act in order to perfect themselves and the world, and in the process, letzaref bahen, to purify themselves and fulfill all their sublime potentialities.

Indeed, Rabbi Akiva himself exemplified this great principle. He was, on the one hand, one of the saintliest spirits in all our history. The Talmud, in imaginative grasp of the truth, tells us that when Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah and he saw the sacred soul of Rabbi Akiva, he protested to God that Akiva was more worthy to be the bearer of Torah than he, Moses, was. And yet, on the other hand, it was the same Rabbi Akiva who did not isolate himself in the academy, but became the sponsor of Bar Kokhba, the great Jewish general who led the revolution against Rome.

This, then, is what mila teaches us: "The work of flesh and blood is beautiful indeed." The world is an uncompleted creation; man's fate is to finish it. This is the principle of activism. The State of Israel was built by people who perceived this Jewish principle. They were the ones who refused to stand aside, outside of the stream of history, but who actively took upon themselves to rebuild Jewish statehood. Their activity was in full keeping with the Jewish tradition as taught by the law of mila. More than enough Jewish blood was spilled in the effort, and the sweat and tears invested shall never be forgotten.

Yet, this is only half the story. There is an opposite danger. If man is indeed a creator, then there is the peril that he will become intoxicated with power and self-delusions, that he will begin boasting and bragging and proclaiming bombastically, "My own power and my own strength have performed all this" (Deuteronomy 8:17). When he circumcises his child, he tends to forget that a healthy child is the gift of God. When he bakes his bread, he does not always realize that the wheat came from God's earth. When he builds his state, he ignores the fact that without the divine promise to Abraham and divine guidance throughout the ages there would be no Jews to build the Jewish state. When he is self-completing, he tends to become, in his imagination, self-creating. He is self-finishing and thinks that he is therefore self-made; and God spare us from self-made men!

To help us avoid this dangerous delusion, we have the teachings of Metzora. Just as Tazria and mila warn us to avoid the passivism that issues from a misunderstanding of faith, so Metzora and the law of the banishing of the leper outside the camp teach us to avoid the fatal illusion that issues from faithlessness. Just as one sidra tells us to circumcise the flesh and assert our manhood, so the second tells us to circumcise the heart and serve our God.

The great medieval scholar Rabbi Elazar of Worms explains the law of Metzora and this banishment outside the camp by means of a comment on a famous verse in the Psalms

(49:13), "Man abideth not in honor; he is like the beasts that perish." Man, says Rabbi Elazar, is born naked and ignorant, without understanding and intelligence. But God puts him on his feet, grants him wisdom and insight, feeds him and clothes him and makes him great. But then man forgets and does not understand that all this glory came to him from his God. Therefore, he becomes like a beheima, a mere animal. An animal is not kept at home, but sent out to pasture; he is unfit to live in a truly human community. So a person who forgets God is a metzora, is morally sick, and must be sent outside the camp of his or her peers. The leper symbolizes the individual who acquired self-confidence at the cost of fidelity to God and therefore is reduced to the role of a beast.

Mankind, then, must be co-creator with God. Tazria teaches that we must imitate our Maker; Metzora reminds us not to impersonate our God, not to be imposters. One sidra stresses the virtue of human commission, the other – the virtue of human submission to God.

Indeed, in an insight brimming with tremendous significance, the eminent Italian-Jewish thinker Rabbi Moshe of Trani finds this second principle in the commandment of mila itself. Just as circumcision teaches that man must act, so its particular designation for the eighth day teaches that his actions must not lead to the mere amassing of power and self-importance. Rather, man must acknowledge and reach out to the Creator of all the world. The number seven, Rabbi Moshe teaches, is the symbol of nature. Seven is the number of days in the week, the unit of time which establishes the rhythm of our lives. The earth, itself agricultural, follows a seven year cycle in Judaism – that of the shemita. The number seven, therefore, stands for this world in its fullness. The number eight, however, is beyond seven – it teaches that you must transcend what seven symbolizes, you must go beyond nature and reach out for the supernatural, for God, He who creates nature. Were mila on the seventh day, then the duty of man would be to correct the imperfections of Nature, but forever to stay within it as nothing more than a clever animal. But mila was commanded for the eighth day, to teach that the purpose of all man's activity, the purpose of his work on Nature, is to elevate himself beyond the perfection of body and mind, beyond the conquest of the world, beyond technology. When man controls his environment, he fulfills the number seven; when he controls his instincts, he reaches the number eight. His technology is symbolized by the number seven; his theology by eight. Mila on the eighth day teaches that man must not only complete himself but must grow beyond himself; he must yearn and aspire to something higher. It signifies not only mila but brit; not only a surgical cut, but the sign of the covenant, a contract with God sealed in blood. It means that if a human being will not strive to be more than human, he must become less than human, an animal: "He is like the beasts that perish" (Psalms 49:13). Then, man becomes a metzora, and like an animal, must be sent out "hutz lamahaneh," outside the camp of human beings.

Indeed, this is the crucial problem concerning the character of the State of Israel: Is it to be the symbol of seven, or the symbol of eight? Will it be just a natural state, or something higher, something nobler? If Israel will be only natural, a state like all others, a small sliver of real estate on the shores of the Mediterranean, considered nothing more than the creation of the Hagana and Sabra ingenuity, then it has no special claim on Jewish communities throughout the world – no more than its population warrants. It has no right to messianic pretenses. Such a conception places it hutz lamahaneh, outside the purview of authentic Jewish history, an aberration. It is then in defiance of the covenant; it is the way of tuma, impurity. Only by fulfilling the symbol of eight, of loyalty to the covenant of God, of Torah, does it go the way of tahara, of purity and rebirth, of joyous fulfillment of the historic dreams and prayers and prophecies of our history.

This, then, is the real problem on this eve of the eighteenth birthday of the State of Israel: Will it be mila or brit? Surgery or covenant? Tazria or Metzora? Tahara or tuma? Striving to be more than a natural human political entity, or falling to a mere natural group which, under the impress of secular nationalism, often becomes beastly ("he is like the beasts that perish")?

Such decisions are never made all at once. They involve long processes measured in historic time, certainly more than eighteen years. Many facts will determine the answer, and not the least of them will be the spiritual leadership in the state under the resolute stewardship of our distinguished and revered guest, His Eminence, Chief Rabbi Unterman, may he live and be well. Their enormously difficult task is to be both responsive to their fellow Israelis and responsible to our Heavenly Father. Like the kohanim in our sidra, they must confront all Jews, the perfectly pure and perilously impure. Sometimes it is their unhappy and tragic task to say to a man: "tamei," "You are impure – you must go out!" Yet their greater and nobler task is to teach this same tamei to return, to bring Jews back into the historic community of Israel, to train all Jews in the way of the Torah's tahara. It is by no means a simple duty; it is, in fact, unenviably difficult. Our hopes and good wishes and our prayers for divine guidance and blessings go to Chief Rabbi Unterman and his distinguished colleagues in this historic mission.

We have spoken of brit mila in relation to the State of Israel. The eighteenth birthday also has another significance – " shemone esrei lehuppa" (Avot 5:22), the eighteenth year is traditionally the year of marriage. Let us conclude then by extending our wishes to Israel in a manner appropriate to both events. Let us all wish the State of Israel divine blessings – leTorah lehuppa ulema'asim tovim. May it be a future of Torah in which Israel will accept the divine word and turn to its Father in Heaven. May it be the time of huppa, the marriage of hearts between Israel and Jews throughout the world. And then, having returned to God and to Jews throughout the world, may Israel become the shining beacon of ma'asim tovim, of good deeds and noble living, throughout the world and for all mankind – leTorah lehuppa ulema'asim tovim, amen.

Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's Derashot Ledorot – A Commentary for the Ages: Leviticus, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern

BS"D

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date: Apr 15, 2021, 5:57 PM
subject: **Rav Frand - Tzaraas Teaches a Major Life Lesson About Negiyus -- Personal Bias**

The Difference Between a Nazir and a Metzorah

In the beginning of Parshas Metzorah the pasuk says: "This is the law of the Metzorah on the day of his purification and he shall be brought to the Kohen…" [Vayikra 14:2]. This pasuk introduces the procedure on the day a Metzorah becomes Tahor. The Torah does not say "he comes to the Kohen" or "he walks to the Kohen". It uses the passive tense: V'hoovah el haKohen – he is brought to the Kohen.

This does not mean the person is put onto a stretcher and wheeled to the Kohen. Nevertheless, it is a peculiar grammatical construct. It seems ironic that by the parsha of Nazir in Parshas Nasso the Torah uses an almost identical introduction to the parsha: Zos Toras haNazir: "This is the law of the Nazir: On the day his abstinence is completed, he shall bring himself (Yavi oso) to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" [Bamidbar 6:13]. These are parallel pesukim!

Rashi over there on the words Yavi Oso interprets "he shall bring himself". Rashi comments that this is one of three occurrences of the word 'Es' that Rabbi Yishmael expounds upon. Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mirer Mashgiach, zt"l, raises the question – why the difference? Why by Metzorah does it say "He is brought to the Kohen" and yet by the Nazir it says he brings himself?

Rav Yeruchem answers that this highlights a fundamental difference between the Nazir and the Metzorah. A Nazir is in charge of himself and a Metzorah is subject to other forces that are in charge of him.

Why does a person become a Metzorah? It is for a variety of reasons. First of all, he cannot keep his mouth shut! Why can't he keep his mouth shut? It is because he can't control himself. Who is in charge? His Yetzer HaRa is in charge. It is his lust, for whatever reason, to gossip and speak Lashon haRa. Another cause of Tzaraas, according to the Gemara is Tzarus Ayin (stinginess). He is very cheap. Why is he cheap? It is because he likes money. So, who is in charge? Do I control my money or does my money control me?

The whole parsha of Metzorah deals with a person who is subject to external forces – be it his mouth, be it his evil inclination to speak Lashon haRa, be it his evil inclination to accumulate wealth, or be it a result of personal pride. All these conditions that the Gemara mentions in connection with Tzaraas are symptomatic of someone who is not a Baale-bos over himself.

Concerning a person who is not in charge of himself, the Torah emphasizes: And he shall be brought (v'hoovah) to the Kohen.

The Nazir, on the other hand, is the one person who is singled out in the Torah for his unique ability to take control of himself. The Nazir senses that he may be headed down a slippery path and says, "I am not going to let this happen to me. I am going to abstain from wine. I am going to abstain from beautifying my appearance. I am going to be in charge of myself!"

Regarding a person who is in charge of himself, the Torah states "Yavi oso" which according to Rashi implies he will bring himself!

We have often quoted the Rabbinic teaching: There is no freer person than one who occupies himself with Torah. Why is he a free man? Does he not have 613 commandments? Is he not bound by a myriad of Rabbinic restrictions? The answer is, because such a person can be in charge of himself. He can say "No" to his evil inclination.

There is a famous vort from Rav Chaim Volozhin on the pasuk "u'mosar ha'Adam min haBeheima – ayin." [Koheles 3:19] (there is no difference between man and animal). Rav Chaim Volozhin homiletically interprets the pasuk as follows: Do you know what distinguishes a man from an animal? Ayin – The ability to say 'No!' When an animal is hungry, he eats. When a human being is hungry, he does not need to eat. He can control himself. That is the difference between a Nazir and a Metzorah.

Tzaraas Teaches a Major Life Lesson About Negiyus

The process of Negaim involves the Kohen viewing the blemish on the skin of the person and then ruling whether or not that blemish is Tzaraas. The Mishna says [Negaim 2:5] "A person can view (and rule on) all blemishes except his own." The simple and correct interpretation of this Mishna is that even though a Kohen can pasken on anyone else's blemish, but if the Kohen has a blemish of his own, he may not view it and pasken on its status.

Beyond the simple and correct interpretation of this Mishna, there is also a life's lesson to be learned from the Mishna's formulation of this halacha. The life's lesson is that "All blemishes a person can see" – meaning I can look at other people and notice their faults. "This person has a temper, this person is haughty, this person is envious" and so forth. I see every fault under the sun in other people! But "except for his own blemishes" – We do not see our own faults. They can be staring us in the face, but we do not see them.

This is one of the great challenges of life. We all have personal biases that do not allow us to see our own shortcomings. We are not even aware of these biases. I always comment that if ever you hear a person say "I may be no'geah (personally affected), but…" do not pay attention to the rest of the sentence. There is no such thing as "I may be no'geah but…" If you are affected by the matter then your opinion is for sure tainted. This is the life-lesson of the Mishna's formulation "All blemishes a person may see except his own blemishes."

I want to relate two incidents that vividly illustrate this phenomenon.

There was a person named Rav Dovid Mirer from the city of Mir and a second person named Rav Dovid Novardok from the city of that name. (In Europe people were often identified not by their last names, but by their city

of origin.) The cities were not far from each other, and the two Dovids knew one another. In the course of their business dealings with one another, they had some kind of dispute which they brought to a Din Torah. They came before the great Rav Chaim Volozhiner to adjudicate their case.
Rav Chaim Volozhiner ruled in favor of Rav Dovid Mirer. Rav Dovid Novardok felt that Rav Chaim Volozhiner made a mistake and that he was wronged in this Din Torah. However, Rav Chaim Volozhiner was the Gadol HaDor and Rav Dovid Novardok was not about to challenge him. However, he always felt that he lost the case unjustly.
Several months later, Rav Chaim Volozhiner met Rav Dovid Novardok and asked a favor of him: "There are two Jews that I know who asked me to hear their Din Torah. I am too busy to adjudicate their dispute. Would you mind taking the case for me? I will even pay you for your wasted time (Schar Batalah) ten gold pieces. But I want you to hear the case and you adjudicate it."
Rav Dovid Novardoker accepted the assignment. He went to adjudicate the case. The two people sat down in front of him and they each presented their claims. Rav Dovid Novardoker ruled in favor of one of the parties. Rav Chaim Volozhiner later asked him "Nu, who did you rule like?" He responded "I ruled like this one person."
It hit him suddenly like a bolt of lightning. It was the exact same case that he had with Rav Dovid Mirer. But he had not been able to see then how his logic was wrong because it was dealing with his own pocket. And yet, when he saw these same facts being replayed with other individuals, he was easily able to see the truth.
After Rav Chaim Volozhin died, these two people came to Rav Dovid Novardoker and explained to him that they never had a Din Torah between themselves. It was all a charade that Rav Chaim Volozhin set up with them. He wanted to teach Rav Dovid Novardoker this lesson – when it is a case involving your own money, you do not view things correctly.
The following is an even more startling incident:
The Shach (Rav Shabsi Kohen, famous Shulchan Aruch commentary (1621-1662)) once had a Din Torah with another Jew. However, nobody in the Shach's city wanted to adjudicate the case because they did not want to take a case where they might have to rule against the Gadol Hador. The Shach and his disputant decided they would travel to another city where nobody knew the Shach and they would have the case heard there. In the seventeenth century, people did not know what the Shach looked like. There were no Jewish newspapers and there were no photographs. People did not see the Shach burning his chometz or lighting his Chanukah candles or making Birkas Ilanos – so people did not know what he looked like!
They went to a Rav in another city. The Shach gave his side of the story and his disputant gave his side of the story and the Rav ruled against the Shach. The Shach said "Ok. You are the Rav. You have paskened, I need to accept it. But tell me, why did you pasken like that?" To which the Rav said, "I paskened that way based on the opinion of the Shach in Choshen Mishpat (the section of Shulchan Aruch dealing with monetary matters) and he quoted the exact chapter and paragraph where the Shach's ruling was recorded.
At this point the Shach was startled. "It is an explicit Shach! It is me!" But even though the Shach ruled clearly in an abstract case, he was still not able to apply it to himself. He was blinded by his personal involvement in the matter! It was because "all blemishes a person may rule on, except on his own blemishes." We see everyone else's faults except our own. This is the scary part about negiyus.
Elisha Told Na'aman to Immerse in the Yarden Based on the Letter Nun
The Haftorah of Parshas Tazria is the story of Na'aman, the Gentile general of the King of Aram. He had Tzaraas and could not find a cure for his condition. He came to the Prophet Elisha seeking help. Elisha told him, "Go immerse in the Jordan River." Na'aman dipped himself in the Yarden. Lo and behold, his Tzaraas was cured. This is the story of Chapter 5 in Melachim II.
The Rokeach, an early Biblical commentary asks: Where did Elisha get the idea that the way for Na'aman to cure himself from Tzaraas would be to immerse in the Yarden?
I would never ask such a question because a Navi is a Navi, and if a Navi says to go dip in the Yarden, you do that. If the Navi says to stand on your head, you do that. You assume the Navi is telling you the word of G-d. But the Rokeach is a Rishon, and he asks this question and gives an incredible answer that only a Rishon could give.
The Rokeach says that there are three—and only three—pesukim in the entire Torah that both begin with the letter Nun and end with the letter Nun. The first pasuk is "Nega Tzaraas, when it will be found in man, he shall be brought to the Kohen." [Vayikra 13:9]. The second pasuk is "Navi from your midst amongst your brethren like myself shall the L-rd your G-d raise up, to him you shall listen (tishma'un)" [Devorim 18:15]. The third pasuk is "Nachnu (we) shall cross over armed, before Hashem, to the land of Canaan, and ours shall be the heritage of our inheritance across the Jordan." [Bamidbar 32:32]. Those are the only three pesukim in all of Chumash that both begin and end with the letter Nun. One is about Tzaraas; one is about a prophet; and one is about the Yarden.
The Rokeach says this was Elisha's insight: The three pesukim reference a Metzorah (Na'aman), a prophet (Elisha), and the Yarden. The clear message is that the prophet should tell the Metzorah to immerse in the Yarden.
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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 http://www.torah.org/ learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

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subject: **Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger - Yom Ha'atzmaut 5781**

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Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger - Yom Ha'atzmaut 5781

Most on Thursday, some on Shabbos, some probably do both and a lot do neither. This, as we have come to expect, describes the observance of Yom Ha'atzmaut during most years. While it seems comically Jewish that we in the diaspora cannot even agree on the celebration of the country's birthday, the fluidity of the timing of the celebrations speaks to a great kiddush Hashem.
I believe Harav Sholom Gold, one-time rabbi of the Young Israel of West Hempstead and subsequently the founding rabbi of the Young Israel of Har Nof, instructed his students to examine the online international list of days of independence. Every country but one has one celebrates its birth on one, easy to determine day on the calendar. Only Israel gets a three line entry, a date with an explanation that reads something like, "the nearest Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday to a specified day on the Jewish calendar."
As unusual as it appears, therein is recorded how Israel, with all of its dreadful secularism, places Shabbos ahead of what is the most important day on the calendar of any other country. (Upon closer scrutiny we can observe the inviolable twinning of Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut, which captures another Torah value, as well. That is, to always keep present the sacrifices of our forebears is part of every yizkor as we conclude our yom tov celebrations.)
Without in any way understating the preciousness of messaging the value of Shabbos, this moment gives us a tiny portal into our larger than life, times to come, mission of teaching and modelling Hashem's sovereignty. This mind exercise, to collect these portals of times to come, is one of the teachings of the Chofetz Chaim. In his essay "Tzipiso Liyeshua" he describes how he appreciated the advent of mass transport as Hashem's preparation for the ingathering of the exiles. The Chofetz Chaim indicated that this thought exercise is a fashion in which we sharpen our own pining and preparation for redemptive times and add speed to their coming.

Our expressions of gratitude during this year's Yom Ha'atzmaut should include our thankfulness for the gift of another such portal. The vaccination rollout which is the envy of, and hopefully will remain the goals, of the Western world, projects our teachings of the unparalleled value of life and the preciousness of personal social interaction. Once again, our ability to imagine how we can be an ohr lagoyim is strengthened and grounded.

That we merit to simply witness that which earlier generations could not contemplate with even this deceiving clarity is a breathtaking opportunity to express gratitude to the Ribbono Shel Olam. May our gratitude give rise to our deepest prayers that we will be the witnesses of the upcoming redemption, and may all those prayers be accepted.

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Parshat Tazria-Metzora: Disease or Divine Reckoning?

Posted on April 10, 2013

Excerpted from **Rabbi Shmuel Goldin's 'Unlocking The Torah Text: An In-Depth Journey Into The Weekly Parsha**- Vayikra,'

co-published by OU Press and Gefen Publishers

The bulk of the parshiot of Tazria and Metzora deal with a description of the dramatic effects of tzara'at, often defined (for want of a better term) as biblical leprosy.

The Torah delineates in fine detail the specifics of this mysterious affliction – which affects individuals, clothes and dwellings – and the steps to be taken under the guidance of the Kohanim towards its diagnosis and treatment.

Questions

What exactly is tzara'at, biblical leprosy? Is this affliction a natural, physical illness or a supernatural phenomenon?

Given the myriad diseases that affect humankind, why does the Torah devote so much text to a description of this specific malady, its diagnosis and treatment?

Approaches

The mystery of tzara'at gives rise to a wide-ranging series of observations among the commentaries.

A

At one end of the spectrum lie those scholars who view tzara'at as a contagious physical illness with dangerous potential for spread to the entire population.

The Abravanel, for example, explains the Torah's concern for "afflicted" clothing in distinctly natural terms. Unlike strong materials such as metal, clothing will readily absorb bodily decay upon close personal contact. The Torah is, therefore, concerned that tzara'at will spread from a metzora (an individual afflicted with tzara'at) to his garments. To prevent further contagion, therefore, all suspicious stains and growths on clothing must be examined by a Kohen.

For his part, the Ralbag interprets the puzzling phenomena of clothing and dwelling afflictions according to scientific theory of his day. Foreign moisture or heat entering an item, he claims, causes an imbalance in that item's natural stasis and leads to the item's disintegration. This destructive process is evidenced at an early stage through the appearance of red or green growth (colors associated in the text with tzara'at).

Although the Meshech Chochma initially categorizes the theme of tzara'at as one of the "secrets of the Torah," he then avers: "Nonetheless, one can say that these afflictions are contagious diseases." The treatment of the illness itself, this scholar maintains, is ample evidence of its communicable nature. The metzora experiences enforced isolation and is required to actively alert others to his condition. Any physical interaction with infected individuals is extremely dangerous. The Torah, therefore, assigns the task of such interaction (the diagnosis and treatment of the ill) to the sons of Aharon who, in their role as Kohanim, are separate from the rest of the people and are granted extraordinary divine protection.

Finally, Rabbeinu Bachya discerns concern for communicable disease in the Torah's mandate that the metzora, at the end of his period of isolation, let loose a bird offering "on the face of the field." The release of the bird into a place absent of human habitation, he maintains, represents an implicit prayer that the metzora's erstwhile contagion should not spread to others.

B

At the opposite end of the spectrum are those commentaries who eschew any natural explanation for the tzara'at afflictions discussed in the parshiot of Tazria and Metzora. These scholars point to a number of details of tzara'at outlined in the Written and Oral Law that are clearly inconsistent with the characteristics of communicable diseases, including:

1. The Kohen diagnoses tzara'at based only on examination of those parts of the body which he can readily see. No careful examination is required in the folds of the body.
2. When tzara'at is suspected in a dwelling, the Torah orders the Kohen to remove everything from the house before conducting his examination. If tzara'at is a communicable disease, such a procedure would expose the public to potentially infected material.
3. Examinations of potential tzara'at are not performed by the Kohanim on Shabbat, holidays, or upon a bridegroom during the seven days of celebration following his wedding.
4. The laws of tzara'at only apply to dwellings in the Land of Israel and only after the land has been divided into individual holdings. These laws do not apply to homes owned by non-Jews or to dwellings of any ownership in the city of Yerushalayim.
5. The laws of tzara'at do not apply to non-Jews. A lesion contracted by a convert before his conversion to Judaism is of no consequence.
6. Under certain circumstances, if lesions cover an individual's entire body he is not considered contaminated.
7. After the nation's entry into the land, a metzora is only to be excluded from walled cities (as determined by the city's status at the time of the conquest of the land). He is to be allowed to remain in unwalled cities and to roam freely through the rest of the countryside. According to Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, these and other details "show the absolute folly" of any attempt to interpret Torah laws as rules and regulations created for health or sanitary purposes.

C

If the afflictions described in the parshiot of Tazria and Metzora, however, are not natural diseases, what exactly are they? What message is God sending the people through the visitation of these frightening supernatural phenomena? What crimes perpetrated by individuals within the nation could possibly trigger such severe divine reckoning?

D

The Talmud lists, in the name of Rabbi Yonatan, seven sins that cause the affliction of tzara'at: evil or damaging speech, murder, perjury, sexual immorality, arrogance, robbery and miserliness.

In similar (albeit more poetic) fashion the Midrash cites six phenomena, drawn from the book of Mishlei, that trigger the illness: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that spill innocent blood, a heart that ponders thoughts of violence, feet always ready to run for evil purpose, false testimony (that results in the spreading of lies) and the sowing of discord between brothers.

Of these associations between crime and punishment, however, only one seems to capture the rabbinic imagination completely. Over and over again, the rabbis link the punishment of tzara'at to the related crimes of motzi shem ra, slander (literally, the bringing out of a "bad name"), and lashon hara, evil or damaging speech. Within a halachic context, motzi shem ra refers to true slander, e.g., the spreading of false information about another individual, while lashon hara refers to the vocalization of any damaging information, even if true. Both of these actions are considered grave transgressions within Jewish law.

The rabbis find support for the link between these sins of speech and the affliction of tzara'at in a series of clues, including:

1. The term metzora itself can be broken down and linguistically connected to the expression motzi shem ra (slander).
2. Moshe is temporarily struck with tzara'at at the burning bush when he casts aspersions on the Israelites by doubting their willingness to respond to God's call for the Exodus.
3. Miriam is punished with tzara'at when she maligns her brother, Moshe.
4. The practical response to tzara'at (seclusion from the community) results in a punishment that fits the crime. The metzora must distance himself through isolation from society because his words created distance between husband and wife, between a man and his friend.
5. The bird offerings brought by the metzora at the end of his period of seclusion mirror the nature of his sin. He injured others through the "chatter" of slander and gossip. His purification is, therefore, effectuated through the means of "chirping, twittering" birds.

E

A much deeper philosophical current, however, courses through the rabbinic assertion of a connection between sins of speech and the affliction of tzara'at. To the minds of the rabbis, few crimes are as damaging to both victim and perpetrator as the crimes of slander and damaging speech.

The foundation for this viewpoint is laid early on in a seemingly strange interpretation offered by the classical translator of biblical text, Onkelos. Commenting on the seminal phrase concerning the man's creation, "And He breathed into his [man's] nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being," Onkelos translates, "…and man became a speaking spirit."

Why does Onkelos cast the Torah's overarching statement of man's creation in such a seemingly narrow light? Why single out the power of speech as the one faculty that distinguishes the human being at the moment of his conception? Aren't man's true distinctions his soul, his intellect and his power of reasoned thought?

A brilliant insight into the approach of Onkelos is offered by Rabbi Yitzchak Arama in an extensive discussion on Parshat Metzora. While man's intellect does set him apart from the beast, this scholar notes, his intellect is only fully revealed and actualized through verbal communication. Speech is the God-given tool through which an individual's heart and mind are reflected to an outside world.

The fundamental connection between verbal communication and man's inner being is underscored by King Shlomo in the book of Mishlei: "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue comes from the Lord."

Because speech is so reflective of man's unique character, the obligations associated with verbal communication carry great significance. An individual who misuses his power of speech degrades himself through the very skill meant to mirror his greatness. So foundational is this transgression, that the perpetrator can no longer lay claim to the majestic title of "a speaking spirit." Improper speech, says Arama, can be compared to "using royal garments to clean the trash heap."

From this perspective, the sins of motzi shem ra and lashon hara acquire another, devastating layer of significance. Much of the literature concerning these transgressions focuses upon the obvious victim, the target of the verbal attack. This focus is certainly understandable. The damage potentially caused to others by an individual's unthinking and deliberately cruel speech cannot be overstated.

Arama, however, together with other scholars, directs our attention towards another victim of these grievous transgressions: the perpetrator himself.

Created in God's image – granted reason, intellect and the ability to actualize that intellect positively in the surrounding world – the perpetrator diminishes his own stature and demeans his human essence. Far from the "speaking spirit" that God created him to be, he reveals himself as a meanspirited creature, oblivious to – or even relishing – the pain his words cause to others. God, therefore, specifically punishes sins committed through speech with the plague of tzara'at, an affliction that mirrors what the perpetrator has done to himself. Through his grave actions, the metzora has fallen from his place at the pinnacle of God's creation. No longer a "living being," no longer a "speaking spirit," he suffers from an illness so severe that the rabbis claim, "A metzora is considered dead."

Ostracized from society, he must experience an isolating period of spiritual repair before he can begin, through true repentance, to reclaim his greatness.

Our tradition hopes that, perhaps then, chastened and humbled, the metzora will realize the truth of the psalmist's assertion: "Who is the man who desires life? Guard your tongue from [speaking] evil and your lips from uttering falsehood."

Points to Ponder

The possible connection between sins of speech and the plague of tzara'at raises serious issues concerning the application of divine justice to our lives. Are we to view the misfortunes that confront us, from illness to accident, as heaven-sent retribution for our sins? Does God punish us today, as He did in biblical times, through the direct visitation of calamity?

The answer that emerges from sources in our tradition seems complex, if not contradictory.

On the one hand, the Torah repeatedly speaks of the calamities destined to befall the Jewish nation as a result of their transgressions. The second paragraph of the Shma Yisrael, recited twice daily by observant Jews, for example, clearly states that the granting of natural bounty in the Land of Israel is contingent upon the actions of the Jewish nation. So direct is the connection between pain and wrongdoing in this world that the rabbis declare: "There is no suffering without sin."

On the other hand, the relationship between affliction and sin in our experience is deeply elusive. The issue of theodicy, divine justice, lies at the core of all Jewish questioning, from the time of Avraham to our day. Even Moshe, whose communion with God was more direct than that of any other individual in human history, is denied insight into the mystery of theodicy.

Anyone who has witnessed the suffering of an innocent child can eloquently testify to our inability to decipher God's ways.

What, then, should our approach be when calamity strikes? Are we meant to view the misfortunes that confront us during our lifetimes as punishment for our sins or as seemingly arbitrary phenomena beyond our ken?

While a full analysis of the overarching philosophical issues emerging from this question are well beyond the scope of our discussion, a lesson emerging from the dawn of our history can be particularly instructive.

Avraham responds to two critical challenges in strikingly different ways.

Confronted with the divinely ordained destruction of the evil cities of Sodom and Amora, the patriarch openly bargains with God in their defense. Challenged, on the other hand, with the Akeida (the God-commanded sacrifice of his son Yitzchak) Avraham emerges from the text as silent and totally compliant.

Where is the patriarch's sense of justice in the face of his innocent son's looming death? How can the man who argued so eloquently on behalf of Sodom and Amora remain silent when confronted with the Akeida and the apparent destruction of his own prophetic dreams of nationhood?

The key to Avraham's behavior may well lie in the vast difference between the two events that confront him.

The fate of the cities of Sodom and Amora is firmly rooted in the realm of din, justice. God informs Avraham: The inhabitants of the cities of Sodom and Amora are evil; therefore, they deserve to perish. When God relates to man in the sphere of din everything makes sense; there is a clear cause and effect. Within this realm, we are invited to argue and struggle with our Creator. Avraham can thus rise and confront God in defense of the cities.

The Akeida, on the other hand, takes place in the realm of nissayon, trial. When God brings us into the sphere of nissayon, arguments and struggle are futile. In this arena, there is no clear cause and effect. In contrast to God's decree concerning Sodom and Amora, no clear reason is given for the Akeida. God is hidden from view and there is no readily perceived logic to His actions.

Man's challenge within the realm of nissayon is solely to pass the trial, to respond to God's will with dignity and constancy of faith. That is why Avraham is silent in the face of the Akeida. He realizes that he has entered the world of nissayon, and that his challenges have changed.

Through prophetic vision, Avraham was able to distinguish between the two realms of din and nissayon and react to each appropriately. We, however, are unable to make this distinction. We have no way of knowing, nor are we meant to know, whether a particular life challenge is a punishment, a trial, or a combination thereof. We therefore react on both levels at once. In times of crisis, we struggle, pray, plead and argue for justice. We allow difficult experience to catalyze our personal repentance and charge our spiritual growth. And, then, when all the prayers are exhausted, when our soul-searching has ended, we turn to God and accept His unfathomable will.

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from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org>
date: Apr 15, 2021, 4:52 PM
subject: How to Praise (Tazria – Metzora 5781)

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt''l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

The Sages were eloquent on the subject of lashon hara, evil speech, the sin they took to be the cause of tsara'at. But there is a meta-halachic principle: "From the negative you can infer the positive"[1] So, for example, from the seriousness of the prohibition against Chillul Hashem, desecrating God's name, one can infer the importance of the opposite, Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying God's name.

It therefore follows that alongside the grave sin of lashon hara, there must in principle be a concept of lashon hatov, good speech, and it must be more than a mere negation of its opposite. The way to avoid lashon hara is to practise silence, and indeed the Sages were eloquent on the importance of silence.[2] Silence saves us from evil speech but in and of itself it achieves nothing positive. What then is lashon hatov?

One of the most important tasks of a leader, a parent or a friend is focused praise. We first discussed this idea in parshat Vayeshev, where we examined the classic text on this – a Mishnah in Tractate Avot (2:11) in which Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai enumerates the praises of his five beloved students:

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arach: an ever-flowing spring.

Every Rabbi had disciples. The imperative, "Raise up many disciples"[3] is one of the oldest rabbinic teachings on record. What the Mishnah is telling us here is how to create disciples. It is not difficult to create followers. Often a good teacher will, over time, notice that they have developed a large following, students who are uncritical devotees – but how to encourage these followers to become creative intellects in their own right? It is far harder to create leaders than to create followers.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was a great teacher because five of his students became giants in their own right. The Mishnah is telling us how he did it: with focussed praise. He showed each of his pupils where their

particular strength lay. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the "plastered well that never loses a drop," was gifted with a superb memory – an important ability in an age in which manuscripts were rare and the Oral Law was not yet committed to writing. Shimon ben Netanel, the "man who fears sin," may not have had the intellectual brilliance of the others but his reverential nature was a reminder to others that they were not merely scholars but also holy men engaged in a sacred task. Elazar ben Arach, the "ever-flowing spring," had a creative mind constantly giving rise to new interpretations of ancient texts.

I discovered the transformative power of focused praise from one of the more remarkable people I ever met, the late Lena Rustin. Lena was a speech therapist, specialising in helping children who struggled with stammers. I came to know her through a television documentary I was making for the BBC about the state of the family in Britain. Lena believed that the young children she was treating – they were, on average, around five years old – had to be understood in the context of their families. Families tend to develop an equilibrium. If a child stammers, everyone in the family adjusts to it. Therefore if the child is to lose their stammer, all the relationships within the family will have to be renegotiated. Not only must the child change. So must everyone else.

By and large, we tend to resist change. We settle into patterns of behaviour as they become more and more comfortable, like a well-used armchair or a well-worn pair of shoes. How do you create an atmosphere within a family that encourages change and makes it unthreatening? The answer Lena discovered was praise. She told the families with whom she was working that every day they must notice each member of the family doing something right, and say so – specifically, positively and thankfully.

She did not go into deep explanations, but watching her at work I began to realise what she was doing. She was creating, within each home, an atmosphere of mutual regard and continuous positive reinforcement. She wanted the parents to shape an environment of self-respect and self-confidence, not just for the stammering child but for every member of the family, so that the entire atmosphere of the home was one in which people felt safe to change and help others to do so.

I suddenly realised that Lena had discovered a solution not just for stammering but for group dynamics as a whole. My intuition was soon confirmed in a surprising way. There had been tensions among the television crew with which I had been working. Various things had gone wrong and there was an atmosphere of mutual recrimination. After filming a session of Lena Rustin teaching parents how to give and receive praise, the crew likewise began praising one another. Instantly the atmosphere was transformed. The tension dissolved, and filming became fun again. Praise gives people the confidence to let go of the negative aspects of their character and reach their full potential.

There is in praise a deep spiritual message too. We think religion is about faith in God. What I had not fully understood before was that faith in God should lead us to have faith in people, for God's image is in each of us, and we have to learn how to discern it. I then understood that the repeated phrase in Genesis 1, "And God saw that it was good," was there to teach us to see the good in people and events, and by so doing, help to strengthen that goodness. I also understood why God briefly punished Moses by turning his hand to tsara'at – because he had said about the Israelites, "They will not believe in me." (Ex. 4:1) Moses was being taught a fundamental lesson of leadership: It does not matter whether they believe in you. What matters is that you believe in them.

It was from another wise woman that I learned another important lesson about praise. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck, in her book Mindset[4], argues that it makes a decisive difference whether we believe that our abilities are innate and determined once and for all (the "fixed" mindset), or whether we may assume that talent is something we achieve through time by effort, practice and persistence (the "growth" mindset). People who take the former approach tend to be risk-averse, afraid that if they fail this will show that they are not as good as they were thought to be. The latter group embrace risk because they take failure as a learning experience from which they can grow. It follows that there is good praise and bad praise. Parents and teachers should not praise children in absolute terms: "You are gifted, brilliant, a star!" They should praise effort: "You tried hard, you gave of your best, and I can see the improvement!" They should encourage a growth mindset, not a fixed one.

Perhaps this explains a sad aftermath in the life of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's two most gifted pupils. The Mishnah immediately following the one quoted above states:

He [Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai] used to say: If all the Sages of Israel were in one scale of a balance and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus in the other, he would outweigh them all. However, Abba Saul said in his name: If all the Sages of Israel, including Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, were in one scale of a balance, and Elazar ben Arach in the other, he would outweigh them all. (Avot 2:12)

Tragically, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was eventually excommunicated by his colleagues for failing to accept the majority view on a matter of Jewish law.[5] As for Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, he became separated from his colleagues. When they went to the academy at Yavneh, he went to Emmaus, a pleasant place to live but lacking in other Torah scholars. Eventually he forgot his learning and became a pale shadow of his former self.[6] It may be that praising his students for their innate abilities rather than their effort, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai inadvertently encouraged his two most talented students to develop a fixed mindset rather than engage with colleagues and stay open to intellectual growth.

Praise, and how we administer it, is a fundamental element in leadership of any kind. Recognising the good in people and saying so, we help bring people's potential to fruition. Praising their efforts rather than their innate gifts helps encourage growth, about which Hillel used to say: "He who does not increase his knowledge, loses it" (Mishnah Avot 1:13). The right kind of praise changes lives. That is the power of lashon hatov. Bad speech diminishes us; good speech can lift us to great heights. Or as W. H. Auden said in one of his beautiful poems:

In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.[7]

[1] Nedarim 11a.
[2] See for example Mishnah Avot 1:17; 3:13.
[3] Mishnah Avot 1:1.
[4] Carol Dweck, Mindset, Ballantine Books, 2007.
[5] Bava Metzia 59b.
[6] Shabbat 147b.
[7] W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," Another Time (New York: Random House, 1940).

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from: Rabbi Berel Wein <genesis@torah.org>
to: rabbiwein@torah.org
date: Apr 15, 2021, 2:02 PM
subject: **Rabbi Wein - Family Vs. Fortune**

Parshas Tazria

Family Vs. Fortune

The Torah indirectly, but softly and clearly, speaks to the continuity of the Jewish people and the human race generally, through the idea of having children. It has been statistically shown that as prosperity rises in certain sections of society, the birthrate in that section of society declines. For me, this was always counterintuitive, because if one is prosperous, then one can certainly support more children. If one is almost impoverished, the difficulty of raising and supporting children is much greater.

The statistics regarding this matter are borne out by much empirical evidence that we also see in our own personal experience. For some reason, the affluent amongst us wish to retain their affluence by not having to spend money on raising and educating children. Children, to a great extent, impose themselves on the lifestyle, comfort, and wealth of their parents.

Having and raising children is a positive act of faith in the future, and the unlimited generosity towards others. The amount of selfishness and

narcissism that unfortunately characterize many in our society today accounts, in a great measure, for the large decrease in the birth rate in many westerns cultures and countries. Europe is shrinking population-wise, and it is only the migration of millions from Africa and other parts of the world that keep its labor supply constant and allow it to function. Eventually this phenomenon causes many other societal problems, and many of those problems are already apparent in France, Germany, Italy, and other parts of Europe where there had been an absorption of many immigrants who have not been able to integrate themselves successfully into European society. The United States is not far behind in this critical problem, regarding the numbers and dimension of immigration and its integration, and the shrinking birthright amongst the well-educated and the well-heeled.

Judaism has always been pro-family… and pro-large family. King Solomon pointed out to us that the future is unknown, and no parent can predict the success and life of one's child. Yet what is hidden from us by Heaven, the Talmud says, need not concern us as far as our duties to obey and perform God's commandments. The future is always inscrutable, and try as we may, and we certainly do, we are unable to guarantee lives and fortunes of the next generation.

The variables in life are so enormous that there is no certainty possible. Having and raising children is a matter of faith and belief that somehow there is a future, and that the children that we bring into this world will be able to manage and benefit from that future.

The Torah emphasizes that women have a strong maternal instinct that drives them to wish to have children, despite the immediate discomfort and long-range problems that all children bring to their parents. It is this life force within the woman that guarantees the survival of the Jewish people, and, in effect, the entire human race. In this week's reading the Torah concentrates on the purity of the woman and her relationship to the Creator through childbirth, for she is "the mother of all life."

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Berel Wein

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from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com>
date: Apr 14, 2021, 4:46 PM
subject: Aish.com Parsha - Tazria-Metzora
(Leviticus 12-15) Apr 12, 2021
by **Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski**

Elixir of Life

If a person (adam) will have on his skin . . .a tzaraas affliction (Vayikra, 13:2).

The Talmud is very clear that the affliction of tzaraas (the exact nature of which is unknown to us) is a punishment for having spoken lashon hara, derogatory speech.

The Hebrew word the Torah uses for "person" in the above verse is adam. There are several other Hebrew words for "person": enosh, ish, gever. The ethical writings state that each refers to a level of spirituality, and adam represents the highest level. We must understand, therefore, the Torah's choice of the word adam for a person afflicted with tzaraas.

The Chafetz Chaim said that the juxtaposition of this portion of the Torah to that of the previous portion dealing with non-kosher animals is to teach us that people who may be meticulously careful about what goes into their mouths should be equally as scrupulous about what comes out of their mouths. There are sins which a Torah observant person would never do, but as for lashon hara, it is a rare person who is saved from it (Bava Basra 164b). Hence, even a spiritual person, adam, is vulnerable to lashon hara.

The Midrash relates that a peddler went through the streets shouting, "Who wishes to buy an elixir of life?" R' Yannai, who was engrossed in his Torah study, asked to see his wares. The peddler said to him, "For you I have nothing." Upon R' Yannai's insistence, the peddler took out a Book of Psalms and showed him the verse, "Who is the person who desires life and loves days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech" (Psalms 34:13-14). R' Yannai then said, "All my life I have been reciting this psalm, but I never understood it until this peddler pointed it out to me" (Vayikra Rabbah 16:2).

This Midrash has puzzled many Torah scholars. What was in these verses that he had never grasped previously? The words of the psalm could not be any clearer: Guarding one's tongue from lashon hara is conducive to long life.

Perhaps we may understand this by examining the Talmudic statement that the remedy for lashon hara is the study of Torah (Arachin 15b). A number of commentaries ask, In what way is Torah study a penance for lashon hara? The Jewish law is that if you have offended someone, it is essential that you make amends to that person and ask his forgiveness. They answer that it is not the study of Torah per se that constitutes penance. Rather, the study of Torah will enable a person to understand the gravity of lashon hara so that he will do what is necessary for penance.

The gravity of lashon hara can be seen in the episode of Joseph and his brothers, which was brought about by his speaking derogatorily about them (Genesis 37:2), and in what happened to the prophetess, Miriam, when she spoke improperly regarding Moses (Numbers 12:1-10). To this very day, we are suffering the consequences of the lashon hara delivered by the spies to Moses (ibid. 13:31-32). This should make one cognizant of how far-reaching the effects of lashon hara can be, and how diligent one must be to do proper teshuvah.

While the mitzvah of studying Torah is extraordinarily great (Shabbos 127a), the Talmud points out that Torah can be a double-edged sword. "If one merits, Torah can be an elixir of life; if one is not virtuous, Torah can be a deadly poison" (Yoma 72b). How penetrating these words are! If used improperly, Torah can be destructive.

The impact of derogatory speech depends on the character of the speaker. If a person who has little credibility makes a negative comment about someone, people are likely to dismiss it as worthless babble. However, if the speaker is a person of stature, a scholar whose opinion carries some weight, the attitude towards his words is, "If he says so, it must be true. He knows what he is talking about." The more learned a person is and the higher he is held in esteem, the more his words are taken seriously.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that every human character trait can be put to good use. But what about vanity? This is so abominable a trait that it repels the Divine Presence (Arachin 15b). How can vanity ever have a positive application?

We can see, however, that even vanity can have a redeeming feature. Before making a negative comment about someone, do not be humble and think of yourself as an insignificant person whose words will not be heeded. This is the time when vanity can temporarily be put to good use. "I must be careful of what I say. People are not likely to dismiss my words lightly. I am an important person, and my words can have a great impact."

The greater a Torah scholar a person is, the more he must be careful of his speech. The words of an esteemed Torah scholar will be taken seriously. If he speaks negatively about someone, he has allowed his Torah scholarship to become a negative force. The Midrash says that lashon hara destroys three people: the speaker, the listener and the one about whom it is spoken (Devarim Rabbah 5:10). If Torah scholarship gives credibility to one's lashon hara, it indeed becomes "a deadly poison."

The man who was peddling the "elixir of life" was not an unlearned person. He was trying to teach people mussar, personal growth. He did not believe that a great Torah scholar like R' Yannai was in need of his teaching. When he told R' Yannai that his teaching about lashon hara was not relevant for Torah scholars, R' Yannai remarked, "I was unaware that people had this mistaken impression. To the contrary, it is those who are Torah scholars who have great need for this elixir of life, because Torah has value only if one is virtuous. Negligence on the part of a Torah scholar, particularly in speaking lashon hara, can seriously distort the value of Torah."

We can be spared from lashon hara if we incorporate the second half of the verse, "loves days that he may see good." In his introductory morning

prayer, R' Elimelech of Lizhensk says, “Help us to see the good in our fellows, and not their defects.”
If we concentrate on looking for the good in people, we will have no need to make negative comments about anyone.

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from: OU Kosher <noreply@ounetwork.org>
date: Apr 15, 2021, 8:01 AM
The Gerald & Karin Feldhamer OU Kosher Halacha Yomis
subject: **Halacha Yomis - Sefiras Haomer**

Q. If someone forgets to count one day of sefiras haomer, are they allowed to continue counting other nights? What if they’re unsure whether a day has been missed?
A. If someone definitely forgot to count a day of sefiras haomer, they should not continue counting with a bracha. This is because there is an opinion that the 49 days of sefira counting is treated as one unit and missing one night invalidates the mitzvah. Nevertheless, since the majority of poskim are of the opinion that there is an independent mitzvah each day, one must continue counting without a bracha (or preferably listen to someone else’s bracha). However, if someone is unsure whether they missed a night, they can continue counting regularly with a bracha. This is because there is a sfek sfeika (double doubt): First, there is a possibility that all days have been counted. Second, even if a day was missed, there is still an opinion that each day is a separate mitzvah. This combination of considerations together allow one to continue counting with a bracha (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 489:8 and Mishna Berura ibid., 37-38).

Q. Even though one who misses a day of Sefira may no longer count with a bracha, if one remembers to count during the daytime, this is sufficient to allow one to continue with a bracha the next night. However, how does counting during the daytime help if the Behag, the author of the view that one who misses a day may no longer recite a bracha, also holds that counting during the daytime does not fulfill the mitzvah?
A. The Behag (quoted by Tosfos, Megillah 20b) maintains that one who misses a complete day of Sefira may no longer count with a bracha, because sefira must be “temimos” (complete). The common understanding of the Behag is that the counting of all forty-nine days constitutes a single mitzvah, and therefore if one missed one day, one can no longer fulfill the mitzvah. However, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt”l explained that even the Behag agrees that Sefiras Ha’omer consists of forty-nine separate mitzvos as indicated by the fact that we make a bracha each night. The reason that a single failure to count can affect the Sefira of the subsequent nights is because the nature of counting implies wholeness and continuity. Counting during the day constitutes an act of counting, even though it is not a fulfillment of the mitzvah and as such does not allow for a bracha. The mitzvah was lost, but with the count restored, Sefira may continue. Missing a complete day produces a list of numbers that are no longer ordinal, and this flaw in the count cannot be repaired. [Adapted from The Seder Night: An Exalted Evening]

Q. In many congregations it is customary for the rabbi to recite Sefiras Ha’Omer out loud at the conclusion of Maariv. If the rabbi missed counting a day of Sefiras Ha’Omer and will be embarrassed if he does not recite the bracha, is there anything he can do?
A. Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (Har Tzvi OC 2:75) writes that Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik (the Bais Haleivi) was in this situation and made the following arrangement so that he could recite the bracha for the congregation: He asked one of the congregants not to recite a bracha and instead have in mind to fulfill his obligation with the bracha of Rav Yosef Dov. A Jew is permitted to recite a bracha on behalf of another even if he already fulfilled his obligation, based on the concept of areivus (Jews are responsible for each other’s mitzvah performance). Although the Bais Haleivi could not recite a bracha for his own mitzvah fulfillment because he missed a day, he was permitted to recite a bracha for the congregant, and it would not be a bracha livatala. The Har Tzvi points out that this approach is subject to disagreement among the Acharonim. The Pri Chadash (OC 489) compares one who missed a day of counting to one who is not obligated in the mitzvah. The rule is that one who does not have an obligation may not recite a bracha on behalf of one who does. However, Har Tzvi shows that other Acharonim disagree with the Pri Chadash. They argue that although a person cannot recite a bracha if he missed one day of Sefira, he is still considered to be obligated in the mitzvah, even though he cannot fulfill it, and he can therefore make a bracha for another. He concludes that the halacha is like the Bais Haleivi. The Shevet Haleivi (3:96) sides with the Pri Chadash and does not recommend this approach of the Bais Haleivi. Still, he writes that the rabbi may recite the bracha for the congregation and rely on the opinion of the majority that even if one missed a day, a bracha may be recited. Although ordinarily, we follow the ruling of Shulchan Aruch (that a bracha is not said if a day of Sefira was missed), in this instance we may rely on the majority opinion (that a bracha can be said after missing a day) to uphold the honor of the congregation and not to diminish the kovod of the rav.

Q. I always daven ma’ariv at the 10 o’clock minyan. Am I permitted to wash and eat a meal when I get home from work at 9 o’clock (after tzeis hakochavim) or should I count sefira first?
A. Igros Moshe (OC IV:99) writes that the proper time to count sefira is after ma’ariv. One should not count sefira before ma’ariv, because of the rule “tadir kodem” (the mitzvah that is more frequent should be done first). Since ma’ariv is recited every night of the year, and sefira is only recited between Pesach and Shavuos, one should daven ma’ariv before counting sefira. An individual who relies on the fact that he always davens at a set minyan so as to eat before ma’ariv, may rely on this as well regarding sefiras HaOmer. Rav Moshe argues that in this case, since he has a set minyan where he always davens, it is better for him to eat his meal and recite sefira after ma’ariv than to recite sefira before the meal, which would be out of order. Nonetheless, if one is afraid that they might forget to count sefira if they wait until after ma’ariv, they may count before ma’ariv as well (Sefer Sefiras HaOmer 3:7).
Subscriber comments and questions related to this mailing can be sent to GerstenE@ou.org.

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from: Mordechai Tzion toratravaviner@yahoo.com
to: ravaviner@yahoogroups.com http://www.ravaviner.com/ Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim From the Rosh Yeshiva
Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a
Ask Rav Aviner: toratravaviner@yahoo.com
Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:
Resurrection
Q: Given the fact that a person's soul was endowed over time in a number of bodies, to which one will it be returned?
A: The soul will be returned to the body that performed the most Mitzvot and good deeds. The Arizal teaches that the existence of the soul in a number of different bodies is a parable not to be understood literally.
Naming a Girl
Q: Should we refrain from giving a three-letter Hebrew name to a girl?
A: No. Note these three-letter Hebrew names from the Torah: Sarah, Rachel, Leah, Chanah, Yael and more.
Irreligious Upbringing
Q: My family isn't religious and I feel inferior to my friends who were raised in religious homes.
A: Throughout our history there are plenty of examples of great Torah scholars from irreligious backgrounds. We all have free choice.
Tikun Chatzot in the Morning
Q: Is there an alternative hour to recite Tikun Chatzot (the midnight prayers over the destruction of the Temple)? I'm too tired to get up that early.
A: You may recite these prayers early in the morning.

Military Service and Yeshiva Study
Q: Is shortened military service morally acceptable even though I do not intend to return to Yeshiva after the army?
A: Definitely. Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehuda Ha-Cohain Kook explains that military service is compulsory and that each student may decide what suits him. Our Nation has a wide range of essential needs in the spiritual realm and in the work force. The calculations are personal.
Immodest Reading Material
Q: May I discard my friend's immodest book?
A: No. It belongs to him. Only a Beit Din may do so, as it says in the Gemara Berachot (20a) that Rav Ada bar Ahava, as an official member of the Beit Din, applied a measure to eradicate public immodesty.
Talmudic Volumes to Facilitate Study
Q: May we study from the Schottenstein volumes (named for the philanthropist who funded the publication) or the Rav Shteinsaltz volumes to facilitate our understanding of the complicated texts or are we expected to apply intense thought without taking shortcuts?
A: It's a personal decision. The preferred goal is to avoid dependence on them and to use them only occasionally to check the explanations. We need an honest assessment of our limitations. Ongoing study improves our abilities. Ha-Rav Ephraim Fishel Hershkovitz, an illustrious Torah scholar and member of the Rabbinical Council of the Tzanz-Kloizenberg Chasidim in North America was asked a question similar to yours and responded as follows: "Are you unable to understand without those explanations?" (This is recorded in the book "HaBen Yakir Li Ephraim", p. 127). Generally our power of concentration and comprehension improves when we are determined to reach our goals.
Snakes as Pets
Q: Are we permitted to have a snake as a pet?
A: Yes, on condition that no harm is caused to others.
Investigating Religions
Q: Is it problematic to look into other religions in order to be convinced that the truth of Judaism prevails?
A: The thorough research of Rav Yehuda HaLevi in Sefer Ha-Kuzari, 1,000 years ago, negates the need for further investigation. See Rambam, Hilchot Avoda Zara Chapter 2:2-3.
Mashiach and Army
Q: When Mashiach comes will the Israel Defense Forces be in operation? I'm a young boy who wants to serve in the army.
A: The Israel Defense Forces will be in full operation. Mashiach himself is a warrior. Rambam, Hilchot Melachim Chapter 11.

Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Tazria-Metzora
תשפ"א תזריע-מצורע פרשת
Tazria
אדם כי יהיה בעור בשרו... והובא אל אהרן הכהן
If a person will have on the שאת skin of his flesh a seis… he shall be brought to Aharon HaKohen. (13:2)

When Moshe Rabbeinu noticed that inspecting the physical plagues that appeared on a body was included in the function of a Kohen, he was troubled. Chazal (Vayikra Rabbah 15:8) say that Moshe had tzaar gadol, great pain, concerning Aharon HaKohen's function to view and render his halachic decision concerning the plague's impurity. He felt that it was below his brother's dignity as Kohen Gadol, High Priest, to engage in such an unappealing task. Hashem quickly reminded Moshe that Aharon and his descendants enjoy twenty-four matnos, gifts, of Kehunah, which Klal Yisrael shares with them. Chazal teach us an important message which pertains especially to the osek b'tzarchei tzibbur, those who are engaged with the needs of the community, the mezakeh ha'rabbim, who bring merit to the many, those who put themselves on the line day in and day out to address the needs of the community. Veritably, they do so much and give up so much of themselves and their families in order to help others, but they do receive the twenty-four gifts of Kehunah, which in the context of the one who works for the community means: Hashem will take care of them. Hashem grants recompense for everything.

Zikui ha'rabim requires a special person. They live for the community, often at the expense of their personal lives – physical and emotional. I remember when the pandemic was raging, my son asked me to speak with his good friend who, as a member of Misaskim, was falling prey to the emotional toll of dealing with both the living and those who were less fortunate. He was one of many who literally risked their lives and emotions to help the members of our community. What they saw, and to what they were exposed, will live with them for the rest of their lives, but so will the extraordinary s'char, reward, that they garnered for themselves. Their families also grew exponentially. When their children grow up and ask them what they were doing during the pandemic, they will have a unique response. Zikui ha'rabbim is a family affair, and the s'char is a family reward.

Reaching out to help others, klal work, applies to many facets of our daily endeavor, from teaching, mentoring, kiruv, to fundraising for community and individual needs. This is followed by spearheading programs to address the various needs of members of our communities. While we have no doubt that these special individuals – both men and women – will receive outstanding reward and recognition from the Almighty, it would be "nice" if we, as beneficiaries, would acknowledge their contribution with a simple "thank you." We take too much of what they do for granted, and if, chas v'shalom, Heaven forbid, something does not work out exactly to our liking, not only do we not thank them, but rather, we hold them responsible. Unfortunately, this all comes with the territory of klal work. It may not always be nice or geshmak, but the satisfaction one derives from helping others has no parallel.

Truthfully, the term zikui ha'rabbim is an inaccurate term. What if one does not reach the multitudes? Are his efforts and dedication any less valuable? How do we define rabim, multitude? Is the term dependent on immediate numbers or long term effect? Chazal teach that he who saves one person in the long term can have an immeasurable effect on others. Do we know? The following vignettes grant us a window to the perspective of the Chafetz Chaim and other mashpiim, men of influence, who changed the spiritual lives of countless men and women.

Horav Meir Tzvi Bergman, Shlita, relates that his father-in-law, Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, once remarked to him, "The Chafetz Chaim, zl, was cloistered for years on end, learning Torah diligently and writing his magnum opus on Halachah, the Mishnah Berurah, and his ethical magnum opus, the Shemiras Halashon. During this time, he created a "man" the likes of whom was the saintly Chafetz Chaim. All of this, the years of solitude, was for one singular purpose: to help others, to allow the world to study Torah and become more proficient in it. In other words, the sole purpose of writing the Mishnah Berurah, which took twenty-five years to complete, was to enable others to learn – not for any other goal. He did not seek to aggrandize his name, to garner attention for himself. He studied Torah so that he could teach Torah. This is why his sefarim are classics that are mulled over by thousands upon thousands of serious Torah devotees. His Shemiras Halashon has forever altered the spiritual panorama of Judaism, by his understanding and teaching of the significance of the spoken word. When we act solely for ourselves, we regrettably do not even reach ourselves!

A Rosh Yeshivah once asked Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl, why it is that the world hangs on his every word. He reviews every statement that he makes over and over, and he enters them into his mind for safekeeping. Rav Shteinman replied by asking the Rosh Yeshivah how much time he devotes to preparing a shiur, halachic discourse. The Rosh Yeshivah replied, "If it is on the yeshivah meseches, the chapter presently being studied in the yeshivah, I spend a few hours. If it is on an abstract topic, I spend even more time. If I am preparing a shmuess, an ethical discourse, it also takes me a few hours." Rav Shteinman listened to his responses, then asked, "And how much time have you spent on preparing the 'speaker'? The

reason that my words are heard is that I am older. I have prepared myself for over eighty years."

The Chafetz Chaim was wont to compare outreach to hunting. He observed that the wealthy landowners who had as much money as they had free time would waste their days hunting in the large forests they owned. They could pass an entire day with hours spent in pursuit of their elusive prey, and, at the end of the hunt, if they were lucky, they might bag one animal. Likewise, one who enters the field of zikui ha'rabim should not determine success by numbers. One person whose life he has changed is worth an entire world.

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, the preeminent maggid in Yerushalayim, was a powerful orator whose dynamic talks would mesmerize and captivate his listeners. His lecturing career had a humble beginning. Following his wedding, Rav Schwadron commenced to give a shiur, class, in Talmud in a small shul that bordered on the Shaarei Chesed neighborhood. Three men showed up for the class: one slept right through; one daydreamed his way through the class; and one listened fifty percent of the time. This went on day after day – the same three men with the same attitude towards the class. Rav Sholom kept on giving the shiur, despite the dismal attendance. One day, the member of the class who had been paying some attention became ill. Apparently, he had fallen and badly injured his leg. It would be months before he could safely return to the shiur. Rav Sholom decided that this was an "opportunity" to terminate the shiur, since the only real participant was no longer attending.

A few days passed, and Rav Sholom realized that, having sat for weeks with the group, he owed the stricken member a house call. He decided to visit him at home. The man (who was no youngster) was very happy to welcome Rav Sholom to his home. While they were speaking, the man stopped and asked, "I heard that you stopped saying the shiur. Why?" Rav Sholom told him the truth, "I really had no one that was attentive. I actually had only one member who paid attention, and, once that ended, I had no reason to continue the shiur." The man was surprised, and he remarked, "Just one? Did you think that I needed your shiur? Did you think that without your shiur we would have no option for learning? Baruch Hashem, neither I nor the other attendees were in dire need of a shiur. But you, Rav Sholom, it was for you an unparalleled benefit to give the shiur. For you, it served as an opportunity for training yourself in the nuances of teaching a shiur. With time and practice, as your self-confidence improved, so would your teaching and speaking skills. We will not lose out, but you can only benefit from the shiur." I think that anyone who has successfully traversed the difficult course from novice to master can attest to this verity. The teacher often has much more to gain than the student. The ability to learn from one's challenges and mishaps, to persevere through them, creates a better, more confident professional.

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from: Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>
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date: Apr 14, 2021, 12:42 PM
subject: Believing is seeing

Believing is Seeing

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Kiddush Levanah on an Airplane

"It was cloudy on motzaei Shabbos, so I was unable to be mekadeish levanah after davening in shul. Later that night, I left for the airport, and I am now sitting in my window seat, which includes a beautiful view of the new moon. May I be mekadeish levanah now, although I am indoors, and I am also obviously looking at the moon through a window?"

Question #2: Havdalah on a Lightbulb

"I have been told that Rav Chayim Ozer, the posek hador before the Second World War, deliberately recited the brocha of borei me'orei ha'eish on an electric light. How could he have done this when a lightbulb must be encased in glass for it to burn?"

Question #3: This Week's Parsha

"What do the above questions have to do with this week's parsha?"

Foreword

Of the many mesechtos of Mishnayos, the tractate named Nega'im, so germane to a proper understanding of both of this week's parshios, may have the distinction of being the least familiar mesechta. Since few of us regard the laws concerning tzaraas on people, clothes and houses to be applicable, there is a tendency to assume that these are difficult topics and, therefore, they are often not studied. Nevertheless, a tremendous amount of Torah knowledge lies in this mesechta, in addition to it being essential to understand this week's Torah readings correctly.

Mesechta Nega'im is arguably the most organized of the mesechtos of Shas. Notwithstanding its length (it is the fourth longest mesechta), someone familiar with it can locate any Mishnah or subtopic effortlessly, since each of its 14 chapters is focused on a very specific aspect of the laws of nega'im and tzaraas.

The first chapter describes the various colors that a nega may have; the second, the details concerning how a nega is examined; the third is an overview and comparison of the various types of nega'im. The fourth chapter discusses the symptoms of white hair and expansion that are mentioned prominently in the Torah; the fifth chapter discusses cases of questionable tzaraas; the sixth explains the laws of healthy-looking skin inside a nega, known as michyah. The seventh chapter discusses cases of nega'im that are not tamei; the eighth analyses the laws of a nega that covers the entire body; the ninth chapter explains the laws of nega'im on injured skin; and the tenth chapter teaches the laws of nega'im on the scalp and beard.

The last four chapters are also very clearly organized, dealing, in order, with nega'im on clothing (Chapter 11), on houses (Chapters 12 and 13) and the process of making someone tahor after he became a metzora (Chapter 14).

Viewing

As I mentioned above, the second chapter of Mishnayos Nega'im is devoted to the details concerning how a nega is examined. Among the many issues discussed here are the times of the day that the lighting is adequate for a kohen to view and rule on nega'im, the quality of vision required of a kohen to do this, and how a kohen examines a nega inside a house that does not have quality lighting.

This week's parsha

Notwithstanding the fact that I have just sung the praises of the importance of proper organization and how much was invested in mesechta Nega'im, I am going to discuss the last of our opening questions first. "What do the above questions have to do with this week's parsha?" To answer this question we need to explore a relatively minor detail germane to the laws of nega'im.

Seeing is believing

Among the issues discussed by the later halachic authoritiesis: What is the halacha if the kohen's vision is impaired and he cannot see the nega properly without eyeglasses? Is this considered that the kohen saw the nega, a necessary requirement to rule the person, cloth or house tamei? Or is this considered that he did not see the nega correctly, and the person, cloth or house remains tahor?

One of the later commentaries on the Mishnah, the Tiferes Yisroel, discusses this issue, and draws analogy to several areas of halacha where we find discussion whether use of an implement to view something is considered as seeing it (Boaz, Nega'im 2:4).

Waxen wane

The first comparison the Tiferes Yisroel draws is to the laws of the reading of the Torah. An early authority discusses the following question: Wax, presumably from a candle in the shul, fell on a Sefer Torah. In the course of reading the Torah on Shabbos, this wax was discovered, and the laws of Shabbos prohibit scraping off the wax. Assuming that the wax is opaque enough that one can read the words underneath, is this considered that the baal keriyah read the Sefer Torah and the mitzvah has been fulfilled, or do we consider those words to be covered and that it is impossible to observe the mitzvah with this Sefer Torah until the wax is removed? According to the

first approach, they can continue with the Torah reading, whereas according to the second approach, they must put the Sefer Torah back and take out a different one to continue reading the Torah portion for this Shabbos.

The Tiferes Yisroel quotes an earlier source, the Leket Hakemach, as ruling that it is permitted to continue using this Torah by reading through the wax. The Leket Hakemach is one of several halachic works by Rav Moshe ibn Chagiz, one of the gedolei hador in Eretz Yisroel in the early eighteenth century. The sefer Leket Hakemach is unusual in that it is an anthology in which Rav ibn Chagiz often quotes the conclusion of many halachic sources without discussing the details of the issues involved. This style became popular over two hundred years later, as evidenced by such works as the Pischei Teshuvah, the Sdei Chemed and the Darchei Teshuvah. In this instance, the Leket Hakemach concludes that it is permitted to read from this Sefer Torah, provided that the baal keriyah can see the word clearly through the wax. This means that the intervening wax is not considered a chatzitzah (block or intervention) from reading the Torah. The Tiferes Yisroel concludes that there is certainly no problem for the baal keriyah or the person receiving an aliyah reading the Sefer Torah to use eyeglasses. Similarly, the Tiferes Yisroel suggests at the outset of his discussion that a kohen could rule on a nega on the basis of what he sees with his eyeglasses.

Chalitzah

A similar question is asked by an early acharon. Can one perform a chalitzah when one of the dayanim can see the procedure only with the aid of his eyeglasses? Is this considered that he witnessed the chalitzah, which is necessary for the validity of the procedure?

The Shevus Yaakov rules that it is perfectly acceptable to perform the chalitzah this way (Shu"t Shevus Yaakov 1:126).

Kiddush levanah and borei me'orei ha'eish

The Tiferes Yisroel then compares his question to an area that has more halachic discussion – whether one can recite the brochos of kiddush levanah and borei me'orei ha'eish, should one see the moon or the flame through glass.

Let's trace this halachic discussion from its sources. The tanna'im (Mishnah Megillah 24a) dispute whether a blind man is obligated to recite the brocha that we recite every morning immediately after Borchu, which closes with the words yotzeir hame'oros, praising Hashem for providing the world with light. Rabbi Yehudah contends that since the blind cannot see sunlight, it is inappropriate for them to praise Hashem for something from which they cannot benefit. The Tanna Kamma disagrees, noting that they do benefit from light, since it enables other people to look out for them. The Gemara proceeds to tell us an anecdote about a blind man who was seen walking in the pitch-black night holding a torch. Rabbi Yosi asked him why he was holding a light, to which the man answered, "As long as the torch is in my hand, people see me and save me from pits and thorns." Thus, although he may not be able to see the light, he certainly benefits from it. The halachic authorities conclude in accordance with the Tanna Kamma that a blind person does recite yotzeir hame'oros (Shulchan Aruch 69:2).

Borei me'orei ha'eish

The Mishnah (Brochos 51b) states that the brocha of borei me'orei ha'eish cannot be recited unless the person can benefit from the light. How much benefit is enough to recite the brocha? The Gemara (53b) states: Enough that he can distinguish by the light between two coins of different size and value.

Upon this basis, the authorities conclude that there is a difference between the brocha of yotzeir hame'oros, which a blind person recites, and the brocha of borei me'orei ha'eish (Ra'avyah, Megillah, and all subsequent authorities). As we just saw, the Gemara provided a quantitative visual criterion for the recital of this brocha, that is, the ability to use the light to discern between two coins. Reciting borei me'orei ha'eish requires not only that one can benefit from the light, but that one must actually be able to see something specific with it. This precludes the blind man from reciting this brocha: although he gains benefit from the light, he cannot fulfill the second requirement, which defines something physical that he can see.

Kiddush levanah

To review, the halachic conclusion was that the brocha of yotzeir hame'oros requires benefiting from the light, but not necessarily seeing the light whereas the brocha of borei me'orei ha'eish requires actually seeing the light and discerning something with its aid.

At this point, we need to discuss the brocha of kiddush levanah, about which the Gemara states that he does not recite a brocha unless he can differentiate by its light between two coins. Should it be compared to yotzeir hame'oros, which would imply that a blind man can recite the brocha, or should it be compared to borei me'orei ha'eish, in which case he cannot?

We find that sixteenth-century authorities dispute this question, the Maharshal ruling that a blind person may and should recite kiddush levanah, whereas his younger contemporary, Rav Yaakov Castro (known as the Maharikash), ruled that he should not. (The Maharikash was born in Egypt around 1525. As a youth he traveled to Yerushalayim, where he studied under the Maharlnach, Rabbi Levi ibn Habib, the posek hador and the rav of Jerusalem. In 1570, the Maharikash, who at that time was a dayan in Egypt, visited Tzefat, where he was a house guest of Rav Yosef Karo, and later recorded in his own writings many of the halachic practices he noticed there. Among the Maharikash's many scholarly works, he authored footnotes to the Shulchan Aruch, sometimes referred to as the "second set" -- the first set being those written by the Rema. The Maharikash named his notes on the Shulchan Aruch, Eirech Lechem, based on the posuk, Shemos 40:23, which means the bread laid out on the table of the Shulchan Aruch. The Rema's notes were called the mapah, the tablecloth on the table. Thus, the three works describe a table perfectly set with bread on it, ready for a meal to be served.)

The Maharshal contends that there is a difference between the brocha of borei me'orei ha'eish and the brocha of kiddush levanah, writing that "the mitzvah of borei me'orei ha'eish is not dependent only on benefiting from the light, but also on being able to see… however this distinction is relative only to borei me'orei ha'eish, but regarding kiddush levanah, it seems to me that someone (who cannot see) can certainly recite the brocha, since the Gemara implies that it is sufficient if mankind in general can benefit from the moonlight" (Shu"t Maharshal #77).

The consensus of the later authorities is to follow the conclusion of the Maharshal that a blind man recites kiddush levanah, unlike the position of the Maharikash (Magen Avraham; Elya Rabbah; Pri Chadash, Biur Halacha , etc., all in Orach Chayim 426).

Kohen and nega

Notwithstanding the many proofs that seeing something through glass is valid, Tiferes Yisroel notes that some halachic sources indicate that a difference exists between the quality of viewing required for a brocha, versus that necessary for testimony. For example, he contends that someone cannot give testimony in court on the basis of something that he saw through a window. (His proof to this position is arguable, but we will not belabor the details.) Tiferes Yisroel contends that germane to testimony, we must be absolutely certain, and we must therefore be concerned that the tinting of color through glass might affect what we see. Similarly, he concludes that a kohen would not be allowed to rule on a nega on the basis of what he sees with his eyeglasses, or through any other glass.

Returning to glass

Let us return to our previous discussion about the mitzvos of kiddush levanah and borei me'orei ha'eish. May one recite borei me'orei ha'eish when the light is covered with glass? We find a dispute among earlier authorities whether one may recite borei me'orei ha'eish when one can see and use the light, but there is a pane of glass separating you from it. The Beis Yosef (Orach Chayim 428) quotes a dispute between the Orchos Chayim and the Rashba (Brochos 53b s.v. Hayesa), the Orchos Chayim forbids reciting a brocha on such a light until it is removed from inside the glass, whereas the Rashba permits it. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 298:15) rules that one may not recite a brocha on such a light, whereas the Magen Avraham concludes that one may.

Kiddush levanah on an airplane

At this point, we can discuss the opening question of our article. “It was cloudy on motzaei Shabbos, so I was unable to be mekadeish levanah after davening in shul. Later that night, I left for the airport, and I am now sitting in my window seat, which includes a beautiful view of the new moon. May I be mekadeish levanah now, although I am indoors, and I am also obviously looking at the moon through a window?”

There are two questions here:

(1) Is it permitted to recite kiddush levanah indoors?

(2) Is it permitted to recite kiddush levanah when seeing the moon through a pane of glass?

Technically, these are two unrelated questions: one can physically see the moon when indoors by looking at it through an open skylight or window, and one can be outdoors and yet see the moon through glass.

Kiddush levanah indoors

Early authorities rule that kiddush levanah should be recited outdoors, since this demonstrates more respect (Shiltei Hagiborim). However, the consensus is that this requirement is only when it is practical to recite kiddush levanah outdoors. A person who is ill is permitted to recite kiddush levanah indoors, and the same law holds true for someone in other extenuating circumstances (Bach; Pri Chodosh).

What a pane!

Shu”t Radbaz (#341) asks an interesting question. What is the halacha if the moon is covered by a very thin cloud in a way that you can see the moon clearly, and it sheds enough light that you can use its light to tell the difference between two coins? The Radbaz rules that kiddush levanah may be recited under this circumstance. Similarly, kiddush levanah may be recited when the moon is clearly visible through glass and there is no practical way to see the moon directly, such as when you are on an airplane.

Havdalah on a lightbulb

At this point, let us examine the second of our opening questions: “I have been told that Rav Chayim Ozer, the posek hador before the War, deliberately recited the brocha of borei me’orei ha’eish on an electric light. How could he have done this when a lightbulb must be encased in glass for it to burn?”

On many occasions, I was told by my Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Yaakov Ruderman, zt”l, that Rav Chayim Ozer recited the brocha of borei me’orei ha’eish on an electric light. Rav Chayim Ozer’s reason for doing so was for people to realize that turning on an electric light on Shabbos involves a Torah prohibition of desecrating Shabbos.

Because of Rav Chayim Ozer’s efforts, today this is realized. However, in his day there were those who contended that turning on an electric switch was considered an indirect way (grama) of doing melacha and, therefore, did not involve a violation of Torah law. In order to demonstrate convincingly how strongly he felt about the issue, Rav Chayim Ozer deliberately recited the brocha of borei me’orei ha’eish on an electric light so that people would realize that turning on this light is prohibited min haTorah.

We see that the fact that the “flame” of an electric light must be encased in glass did not disturb Rav Chayim Ozer, since it can be seen clearly through the glass.

In summation

The Magen Avraham and most later authorities rule that one can fulfill the mitzvos of kiddush levanah 426:1) and borei me’orei ha’eish (298:20) when seeing the moon or the light through glass. It might be that this is insufficient for a kohen checking a nega, where there is a good possibility that he must see the nega without anything intervening.

Conclusion

Through this discussion, we see how understanding Torah properly involves deep familiarity with halachic sources that are ostensibly dealing with other topics. The rishonim referred to this as divrei Torah aniyim bimkomam va’ashirim bimkom acheir, the words of Torah are few in the discussion at hand, but vast and more explanatory in other places (see, for example, Tosafos, Kerisus 14a). Thus a posek must have a broad base of halachic knowledge.

PARSHAT METZORA

by Rav Eitan Mayer

UH . . . SHOULD WE STOP AND ASK SOMEBODY?

When you're on the road, there are two different aspects to being lost:

1) You know in which direction you're heading, but you don't know exactly where you are at the moment. At many of the points along the way to your destination, you have no idea where you are -- you just keep following the signs to the place you want to go. There are hours of traveling in which you have not the faintest idea what towns you are passing through, no knowledge of the people there, no awareness of the significant landmarks you are passing. In terms of where you are, you are "lost"; in terms of where you're headed, you're not lost at all.

2) You know where you are, but not where you're headed. When you pass through a town, you have a clear sense of where you are in relation to other towns, in relation to the important historical sites in the area, perhaps also in relation to the important natural features of the area. You are completely lost from the "destination" perspective: you have no idea where you want to be. But you are not at all lost from the "current location" perspective.

There same two aspects of being lost apply to our progress through the text of the Torah:

1) Not knowing where we are: we may be "lost" in and confused by the swirling details of halakha with which Sefer VaYikra (Leviticus) is filled -- korbanot (sacrifices), purity, holiness, strange diseases, priestly halakhot, etc. -- but we know even now that we are headed for a nice chunk of more of this kind of material and that when the Sefer ends, we will return to narrative in Sefer BeMidbar (Numbers). We may be unfamiliar with the territory around us, but we know where we are headed.

2) Not knowing where we're headed: we may have no idea of the order of topics ahead on the biblical "road," we may not be thinking much about our destination, and we may have no concept of the large-scale structure of the Torah or of Sefer VaYikra, but we are not "lost" in the sense of our having a good grasp of where we currently are: the meaning of the texts we are currently passing through.

In order for us not to be "lost," we need to be looking not just at the numbers of the perakim (chapters) to see when this highway comes to an end and Sefer BeMidbar begins, but also at the lay of the land around us. What is the general topic of the part of Sefer VaYikra which we are currently learning? Right now, we are deep into the thick of a large section of Sefer VaYikra which focuses on tahara (purity) and tum'a (impurity). The basic breakdown of this tahara section is as follows:

Perek 11: living creatures that may be eaten, and which transmit tum'a (ritual impurity).
Perek 12: the impurity occasioned by the act of giving birth -- and how the "parturient" follows a process to remove the impurity.
Perek 13: the impurity occasioned by contracting the condition called "tzara'at."
Perek 14: (mainly) details of the complex process of removing the impurity of tzara'at.
Perek 15: the impurity occasioned by genital discharges: blood, semen, etc.
Perek 16: the once-yearly purging of the impurity of the Mikdash (Temple): Yom Kippur.

With this "local map" in mind, we turn to tzara'at.

TZARA'AT: THE BIBLICAL PRESCRIPTION:

Before we discuss what is behind tzara'at -- why people get it and what it is supposed to mean to them -- we need to first summarize what the Torah tells us about diagnosing and responding to tzara'at. The Torah describes a particular regimen to treat tzara'at. This regimen splits into several stages:

1) EXAMINATION BY THE KOHEN: a person who believes he or she may have tzara'at comes to a kohen (priest), who examines the "lesion." The Torah devotes a huge amount of detail to describing what tzara'at looks like so that the kohen can diagnose whether the lesion is benign (spiritually benign, that is) or malignant. Discolorations, scars, burns, boils, and

other eruptions on the skin are all candidates for tzara'at suspicion. Sometimes it is unclear at first sight if a lesion is tzara'at, so the "patient" is "quarantined" for a short period and then examined again.

2) DECLARATION OF STATUS: once the lesion has been examined, or once the quarantine, if prescribed, is over, the kohen is ready to declare whether the lesion is tzara'at, and therefore tamei (ritually impure), or "benign" and therefore tahor (ritually pure). If the person is tahor, he or she returns to normal life. If the lesion turns out to be tzara'at, the kohen declares the person officially tamei.

3) REACTION BY THE METZORA (person stricken with tzara'at): The Torah prescribes the following procedure in 13:45-46 for one who is definitively diagnosed with tzara'at:

"The person stricken with tzara'at, who has the lesion -- his clothing should be torn, his head should be unwrapped, he should wrap upon his moustache, and "Tamei, tamei!" he shall cry out. All of the days that the lesion remains upon him, he shall be impure; he is tamei, he shall sit alone; outside the camp shall be his dwelling."

It is important for us to pay careful attention to the behavior of the metzora at the moment he learns of his unfortunate status. It appears that the model for the behavior of the metzora is the paradigm of avelut, mourning. A mourner is required to perform "keria," ripping his or her clothing, and "periat rosh," loosening the hair, as we know from other contexts in the Torah. But what does covering one's mustache have to do with anything?

A look at Yehezkel 24:17 shows that among the many symbolic acts of avelut listed there is this act -- literally, "covering the moustache." It is likely that the meaning of the gesture is not literally to cover the moustache, but to drape a hood or cowl over one's head and hide most of one's face from the world -- the hood should extend over the face all the way until the upper lip, the moustache.

The next two elements of the behavior of the metzora point to a somewhat different theme than avelut: while crying out "Tamei! Tamei!", warning others to avoid him, he makes his way out of the camp to solitary life until he is healed. These are not acts of avelut; they are acts which shame and isolate the metzora.

We will try to make meaning of this behavior as we go on.

4) TREATING THE DISEASE: scour the Torah from top to bottom, and surprisingly, you will find that it prescribes no treatment at all for tzara'at! The Torah goes straight from the lengthy description of the varieties of tzara'at (13:1-44) to the brief piece we just read about the banishment of the metzora (13:45-46). The Torah then discusses tzara'at on clothing, and then moves straight to dealing with what to do when the metzora is already healed (perek 14). But where is the healing process itself? There seems to be a huge gap between chapter 13 -- the disease and the rejection of the metzora from human life -- and chapter 14, where he is already healed and is brought back into the community. So, while I have counted "treating the disease" as a stage, it is completely absent in the Torah. This is certainly an anomaly. Why spend so much time on the disease only to fall silent about its therapy?

One interesting confirmation of the fact that the healing process really is not the point here is the fact that the words "tamei" and "tahor" appear at least 30 times each in perakim 13-14, while "nirpa," "healed," appears only four times.

5) RESTORING THE HEALED METZORA TO THE COMMUNITY: once he or she has been healed, the metzora is examined again by the kohen, who then conducts an elaborate set of rituals which purify the metzora of tum'a and allow him or her to return to the community.

BUT WHAT IS IT?

Now we are more ready to ask the basic question: what is tzara'at? Clearly, it is a skin disease, but it is difficult to identify it with a disease known to modern medical science. One thing that should be clear is that it is not "leprosy"! This mistake is an old one, first made by John of Damascus, an Arab doctor of the ninth century, who mistakenly took the Greek translation of tzara'at, "lepra," to mean "leprosy," when in fact the Greek word for leprosy is something like "elephas." Just about all translations have followed John of Damascus's mistake.

What may be more attractive is the suggestion that tzara'at is not one disease only, it is a group of different diseases

which the Torah refers to by one name since they all have the same effect: they signal impurity and set in motion a complex process of isolation and then, upon healing, purification. But again, most of the diseases which seem to reflect what the Torah describes -- such as psoriasis, perhaps, and some types of fungal infection -- seem not to fit the bill from another perspective, and that is that the Torah prescribes one-week waiting periods to see if a suspected infection is actually tzara'at, while these diseases usually do not change at all within a week's time, so waiting a week would show nothing.

We are left with the possibility that tzara'at either does not appear nowadays, or that it does appear but is not recognized. But no matter what disease we identify it with, a nagging question remains: why is the Torah so concerned about tzara'at? In terms of the sheer number of pesukim, there is more information in the Torah about tzara'at than there is about Shabbat! Why does the Torah care about this disease? What about cancer, heart disease, tuberculosis, black plague, AIDS, hemorrhagic fever, smallpox?

One strategy to look for an answer is to take a look at the places where people in Tanakh get tzara'at and try to identify what the circumstances are.

FAMOUS CASES OF TZARA'AT:

1) MIRIAM'S TZARA'AT: The most famous case of tzara'at is certainly that of Miryam, in BeMidbar 12:1-15. Miryam speaks negatively about Moshe to her other brother, Aharon. Hashem, eavesdropping on her carping, is incensed. He angrily reprimands Miryam for her temerity and strikes her with tzara'at. Aharon turns to Moshe to beg him to pray for his sister's recovery:

"Please, master, do not hold against us the sin we have been foolishly done and in which we have sinned. Let her not be like a corpse, who, when he emerges from his mother's womb, half of his flesh is consumed!"

Aharon begs for mercy, but **he also offers an important characterization of the appearance of tzara'at: someone with tzara'at looks dead -- specifically, like a stillborn baby!** The rampant peeling of skin which takes place as the infection attacks the skin reminds Aharon of the appearance of a still-born baby, as medical sources indicate that the skin of still-born babies peels profusely and spontaneously.

Aharon, then, offers another connection between tzara'at and death: not only does the metzora engage in practices normally associated with mourning, as we saw above, but **there even seems to be a corpse here: the metzora himself**! The bereaved and the decedent are the same person; the metzora mourns his own death. Keep this connection in mind as we gather more information.

2) MOSHE'S TZARA'AT: in Shemot 4:1-7, Moshe is stricken (very briefly) with tzara'at. Commanded by Hashem to announce to Bnei Yisrael that Hashem has recalled His promises to redeem them, Moshe balks, insisting that Bnei Yisrael will not believe him. Hashem becomes impatient with Moshe and offers him several miracles with which to convince the ostensibly doubting Bnei Yisrael. First Hashem turns Moshe's staff into a serpent, one frightening enough to make Moshe turn and run. The second sign is that Moshe's hand is momentarily afflicted with tzara'at. Besides being impressive miracles, both of these signs also punish Moshe: he has doubted Bnei Yisrael's faith, asserting that they will reject him, and has also refused Hashem's command to attempt to lead them. In response, Hashem slaps him on the wrist.

3) GEHAZI'S TZARA'AT: Gehazi, the servant of Elisha (the prophet), suffers tzara'at when he lies to Elisha (Melakhim II:5); here, the tzara'at is explicitly directed against Gehazi by Elisha's curse.

4) Azaryahu, a king of Judah, suffers tzara'at, ostensibly for not removing the private altars on which the people were sacrificing to idols (Melakhim II:15).

5) Uzziyahu, another king, suffers tzara'at when he attempts to usurp the kohenic function of burning the ketoret (incense) on the mizbe'ah in the Mikdash (Divrei Ha-Yamim II:26). (Some believe that Azaryahu and Uzziyahu were one and the same person.)

IMPLICATIONS:

We can extract three general ideas from these cases:

1) Tzara'at seems to be a punishment: in all of the cases above, it follows sin.

2) Tzara'at can be a punishment for interpersonal sins and for sins against Hashem.

3) Tzara'at is connected in some way with death.

TZARA'AT AND DEATH:

Let's review for a moment. What indications do we have of connections between death and tzara'at?

1) The metzora is commanded to behave as a mourner, as if someone has died.

2) Aharon pleads that Miryam not remain as a "dead person," stricken by tzara'at (Hazal -- Nida 64b -- also say that a metzora is considered as if dead).

But there are also other connections:

3) A corpse communicates tum'a not just to one who touches or carries it, but even to one who is under the same roof as the corpse ("be-ohel," or, more specifically in the case of metzora, "be-moshavo"). (This is why kohanim never go to funeral parlors, except if the deceased is an immediate family member.) This characteristic of communicating tum'a even by sharing a roof is found in no category of tum'a besides the met (corpse) -- and metzora!
4) The purification ritual: in Parashat Metzora, we learn of the elaborate ritual for purifying a metzora once he has been healed of his tzara'at:

VAYIKRA 14:4-7 --

The kohen shall command to take for the one who is to be purified (i.e., the former metzora) two wild, tahor (=kosher) birds, cedar wood, red thread, and hyssop. The priest shall command that one of the birds be slaughtered in an earthen vessel over live water. He shall take the living bird, the cedar wood, the red thread, and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered above the live water. He shall sprinkle upon the one who is to be purified from tzara'at seven times, and purify him . . . .
Note that the ritual involves cedar, hyssop, red thread, fresh water, and the blood of an animal. The mixture is sprinkled on the metzora to purify him.

In Sefer BeMidbar, we learn of another elaborate ritual: the process by which the kohen purifies a person who has contracted tum'at met, corpse impurity. This is familiar to many of us as the ritual in which the ashes of the Para Aduma ("reddish cow") are used:

BEMIDBAR 19:6, 17-19 --

The kohen shall take cedar wood, hyssop, and red thread, and throw them into the midst of the burning of the cow (i.e., the reddish cow, which had been slaughtered and whose blood had then been burned with its flesh to ashes) . . . . They shall take, for the tamei person, from the ashes of the burning of the hattat (as discussed in previous shiurim, the Torah refers to the Para Aduma as a "hattat") and place fresh water into it in a container. A pure person should take hyssop, dip it into the water, and sprinkle it . . . [on the impure person].

Here again, we have a purification ritual (removal of tum'a) which requires the blood of an animal, mixed with fresh water, cedar wood, hyssop, and red thread, where the mixture is poured onto the tamei person. What we see, then, is that the purification ritual for a metzora is strikingly similar to the purification ritual for someone who has touched a corpse.

AN INSTALLMENT RITUAL?

One other ritual which the healed metzora must undergo, besides bringing various sacrifices, is a ritual in which the

kohen takes blood from the asham sacrifice offered by the former metzora, and puts some of it on the right earlobe, right thumb, and right large toe of the former metzora. The same is done with oil brought by the former metzora.

This very unusual ritual should remind us of a similar ritual we encountered just a few weeks ago in reading Parashat Tzav: when Aharon and his sons enter the seven-day period during which they are transformed into kohanim (and during which the inauguration of the entire Mishkan takes place), Moshe performs the exact same ritual on them!

1) Just as Moshe anoints the Klei Mishkan (Mishkan "furniture") to inaugurate it and sanctify it, so he does to the kohanim;

2) Just as the corners of the Mizbe'ah (altar) are anointed because the extremities represent the whole, so are the "corners" of the kohanim anointed because their extremities represent the whole (in case you are wondering how earlobes are "extremities," remember that the Torah refers to the area at the ear as the "corner" of the head, which must not be shaved; this is why everyone refers to the hair of this area as "pe'ot," "corners").

But what meaning does the ritual have for the healed metzora?

ANOMALIES ---> THEME?

Let us recount all of the anomalies or latent themes we have encountered in tzara'at:

1) Parallels to (or aspects of) death:

a) Mourning behaviors

b) Aharon's characterization of tzara'at as having the appearance of death

c) Tum'a is communicated via "ohel" by only two types of tum'a: tzara'at and corpses

d) The remarkably similar rituals for purifying a metzora and a tamei met

2) A close parallel to the sanctification ritual of the kohanim.

3) The fact that no healing process is prescribed or even discussed by the Torah.

DEATH AND REBIRTH:

Putting these all together yields the following picture: tzara'at is not a medical issue, it is a spiritual issue. This explains why the kohen is so prominent in diagnosing and purifying the metzora, instead of the doctor**. It also explains why the Torah is so focused on this particular disease: the Torah is not concerned with the proper treatment of diseases, but with the treatment of this particular malady, which, as we have seen, arrives as a punishment for sin. There is no prescription for a cure because the cure is not the kohen's responsibility -- it is that of the metzora himself!** His isolation outside the camp serves the dual function of punishing and creating an opportunity for him to do some serious, undisturbed soul-searching. Indeed, he may NEVER be healed if he does not do teshuva; he might remain forever caught between the condemning diagnosis of perek 13 and the redemptive post-healing rituals of perek 14.

Tzara'at looks like death. It is a personal message from Hashem that He is deeply unhappy with one's behavior; in a sense, it is the physical manifestation of catastrophic spiritual decay. Hashem communicates with us not only by sending prophets, but by sending lesions which expose our internal, spiritual "death" to ourselves and all the world. It should be no shock that there is mourning, for someone has truly "died"! The mourner and the deceased are the same person, as the metzora mourns his own spiritual death/decay. He still lives, physically, although signs of death are apparent; and, like a corpse, his tum'a can be communicated merely by sharing the same roof.

The process of healing is one in which the metzora rids himself of the signs of death by re-creating himself spiritually. His time in banishment forces him to make the choice between continued decay and radical rejuvenation. If he chooses the latter, he becomes, to borrow a phrase from another religion, a "born again" Jew. He was dead -- there was even

mourning for him! But, having done teshuva and thereby rid himself of the tzara'at lesions, he now he is alive once again. Removing the powerful tum'a incurred by his temporary "death" requires a ritual almost exactly duplicating the ritual for removing the tum'a caused by contact with a real corpse. Of course, the irony is that here, the corpse itself is being purified as it comes back to life!

But this step is not enough. Tum'a's usual opposite is tahara, purity; but in order to re-enter the community from which he had been banished, the metzora needs more than simply purity. The community, after all, is not just alive, it is also kadosh, holy -- it is not just a community of people, it is Bnei Yisrael, Hashem's "Am segula," his "goy kadosh," the holy nation. To rejoin the people, the metzora must also be re-sanctified, rededicated to Hashem as a member of His chosen people. In the same way that the earlobe/thumb/toe ritual raises Aharon and his sons from the kedusha level of all of Bnei Yisrael to the higher kedusha of kohanim, the same ritual raises the metzora from the kedusha of all people to the higher kedusha of a member of Kelal Yisrael. He is then ready to rejoin the community of Bnei Yisrael.

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PARSHAT TAZRIA / METZORA

Anyone who understands the opening pasuk of Parshat Acharei Mot immediately realizes that this entire Parsha belongs in Parshat Shmini! Why then do Parshiot Tazria/Metzora 'interrupt' this logical sequence?

In case this sounds a bit complicated, don't worry; we'll begin this week's shiur by first explaining this question. Then we'll use its answer to help us arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the structure and theme of Sefer Vayikra.

INTRODUCTION

Recall that the first half of Parshat Shmini included the story of tragic death of Aharon's two sons - Nadav & Avihu (see 10:1-9). Recall as well that Parshat ACHAREI MOT (several chapters later) opens with God's commandment to Moshe & Aharon in the aftermath of that event:

> "And God spoke to Moshe and Aharon AFTER THE DEATH of the two sons of Aharon..." (16:1)

Hence, it would have been more logical for the Torah to include this commandment in Parshat Shmini - immediately after the story of their death. [In other words, Vayikra chapter 16 should follow immediately after chapter 10!]

However, we find instead that chapters 11 thru 15, detailing numerous laws concerning various types of "tumah" [spiritual uncleanliness], form an 'interruption' to this logical flow.

To explain why, Part One of our shiur will explore the thematic relationship between these laws of "tumah" and the story of Nadav & Avinu's death. In Part Two, we will build an outline that will summarize these laws of "tumah" that will help us appreciate their detail.

PART ONE - WHAT DID NADAV & AVIHU DO WRONG?

As you are probably aware, there are numerous opinions concerning what Nadav & Avihu did wrong. The reason for this difference of opinions is simple; the Torah only tells us WHAT they did, but does not explain WHY they were punished. Therefore, each commentator looks for a clue either within that pasuk (see 10:1) or in the 'neighboring' psukim in search of that reason.

> [For example, the word "aish zarah" in 10:1 implies that Nadav & Avihu may have sinned by offering the wrong type of fire. Alternately, the 'parshia' that follows discusses laws that forbid the kohanim to become intoxicated (see 10:8-11), thus implying that they may have been drunk. (See Rashi, Ramban, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni, etc.) In fact, each commentary on this pasuk is so convincing that it is truly hard to choose between them.]

However, in contrast to that discussion concerning what specifically Nadav & Avihu did wrong (and why), our shiur will focus instead on the more general connection between this incident and the overall structure (and theme) of Sefer Vayikra.

FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

Even though the Torah does not tell us specifically WHY Nadav & Avihu were punished, the pasuk that describes their sin does provide us with a very general explanation:

> "va'yikrvu aish zara - ASHER LO TZIVAH otam" - and they offered a 'foreign fire' that GOD HAD NOT COMMANDED THEM (see 10:1)

However, finding this phrase "asher lo tzivah otam" should not surprise us. In relation to the construction of the Mishkan, we found this phrase repeated numerous times in our study of Parshiot Vayakhel & Pekudei.

> [To refresh your memory, just note how "ka'asher tzivah Hashem et Moshe" [As God has commanded Moshe] concludes just about every "parshia" in Parshat Pekudei. See not only 35:29; 36:1; & 36:5 but also 39:1,5,7,21,26,29,31,32,42,43 & 40:16,19,21,23,25,27,29,32!]
>]

Furthermore, this phrase first appeared at the very introduction of the Mishkan unit that began in Parshat Vayakhel:

> "And Moshe said to the entire congregation of Israel [EYDAH] ZEH HA'DAVAR - ASHER TZIVAH HASHEM - This is what GOD HAS COMMANDED saying..."
> (see 35:1,4, see also 35:1)

Finally, thus far in Sefer Vayikra we have found this same phrase when the Torah describes the story of the Mishkan's dedication. First of all, in the the seven day "miluim" ceremony:

> "And Moshe said to the entire EYDAH [gathered at the Ohel Moed/8:3] - ZEH HA'DAVAR - This is what GOD HAS COMMANDED to do..." (Vayikra 8:4-5, see also 8:9,13,17,21,36.)

And in Moshe Rabeinu's opening explanation of the special korbanot that were to be offered on Yom ha'Shmini:

> "And Moshe said: ZEH HA'DAVAR - THIS is what GOD HAS COMMANDED that you do [in order] that His KAVOD [Glory] can appear upon you [once again]..." (9:6, see also 9:1-5)

Carefully note how Moshe declares this statement in front of the entire "eydah" [congregation] that has gathered to watch this ceremony. [See 9:5! Note also in 9:3-4 that Moshe explains to the people that these korbanot will 'bring back' the "shchinah".]

In fact, when you review chapter 9, note how the Torah concludes each stage of this special ceremony with this same phrase. [See 9:5,6,7,10,21.]

Therefore, when the Torah uses a very similar phrase to describe the sin of Nadav & Avihu on that day - "va'yikrvu aish zara - ASHER LO TZIVAH otam" (see 10:1), we should expect to find a thematic connection between that sin and this phrase.

To find that connection, we must consider the reason why the Torah uses this phrase so often in its details of the Mishkan's construction.

EMPHASIZING A CRITICAL POINT

Recall that Nadav & Avihu's sin took place on the 'eighth day'. Earlier on that day (as the ceremony was about to begin) Moshe had gathered the entire nation to explain the PRECISE details of how the korbanot would be offered on that day.

> [Note again, the key phrase: "zeh ha'davar asher tzivah Hashem..."/ see 9:4-6.] In fact, Moshe made two very similar remarks before the entire nation before the Mishkan's original construction (Shmot 35:1,4), and before the seven day MILUIM ceremony (see Vayikra 8:1).

Why must Moshe, prior to offering these special korbanot, first explain the details of these procedures to the entire congregation who have gathered to watch?

The Torah appears to be sending a very strong message in regard to the Mishkan. God demands that man must act precisely in accordance to His command - without changing even a minute detail.

NADAV & AVIHU's PUNISHMENT

With this background, we can better understand why Nadav & Avihu are punished. On the day of its public dedication - on Yom ha'Shmini - they decide (on their own) to offer KTORET. Note the Torah's description of their sin:

> "And Nadav & Avi each took their firepan, put in it fire and added KTORET, and they brought an alien fire in front of God which He HAD NOT COMMANDED THEM ['asher lo tzivah']"

Their fire is considered "aish zarah" [alien] simply because God 'did not command them' to offer it. [Note the special emphasis upon the word "lo" according to the "taamei mikra" (cantillation). See also commentary of Chizkuni on 10:1.

Nadav & Avihu may have had the purest intentions, but they made one critical mistake - they did not act according to the precise protocol that God had prescribed for that day. Considering that the entire EYDAH gathered at the Ohel Moed recognize that Nadav & Avihu have strayed from protocol, they must be punished; for the lesson of that day was exactly this point - that in the Mishkan man must meticulously follow every detail of God's command.

> [Note, this interpretation does not negate any of the other opinions which suggest that Nadav & Avihu had done something else wrong [such as drinking or disrespect of Moshe, etc.]. It simply allows us to understand the severity their punishment EVEN if they had done nothing 'wrong' at all (other than doing something that God had not commanded). See also commentary of Rashbam on 10:1 in this regard.]

From a thematic perspective, their punishment under these circumstances is quite understandable. Recall the theological dilemma created by a MISHKAN - a physical representation (or symbol) of a transcendental God. Once a physical object is used to represent God, the danger exists that man may treat that object [and then possibly another object] as a god itself. On the other hand, without a physical representation of any sort, it becomes difficult for man to develop any sort of relationship with God. Therefore, God allows a Mishkan - a symbol of His Presence - but at the same time, He must emphasize that He can only be worshiped according to the precise manner "as God had commanded Moshe".

> [See also Devarim 4:9-24 for the Torah's discussion of a similar fear that man may choose his own object to represent God [a "tavnit..." / compare Shmot 25:8-9 "v'akmal".]

THE PROBLEM OF 'GOOD INTENTIONS'

This specific problem of 'following God's command' in relation to the Mishkan takes on extra meaning on Yom ha'Shmini.

Recall our explanation of Aharon's sincere intentions at the incident of "chet ha'egel", i.e. he wanted to provide Bnei Yisrael with a physical symbol of God, which they could worship. [See previous shiur on Ki-tisa.] Despite Aharon's good intentions, his actions led to a disaster. The sin of "chet ha'egel" caused KAVOD HASHEM [God's Glory (="shchina"]), which had appeared to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai, to be taken away (see Shmot 33:1-7).

Due to Moshe's intervention, God finally allowed His SHCHINA to return to the MISHKAN that Bnei Yisrael had built. But when Nadav & Avihu make a mistake (similar to Aharon's sin at chet ha'egel) on the very day of the Mishkan's dedication, they must be punished immediately.

> [Not only can this explain why they are so severely punished, it may also help us understand their father's reaction of: "va'YIDOM Aharon" [and Aharon stood silent] (see 10:3).]

Finally, this interpretation can help us understand Moshe's statement to Aharon: "This is what God had spoken -B'KROVEI E'KADESH..." (see 10:3). Recall the parallel that we have discussed many times between Har Sinai and the Mishkan. At Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael AND the Kohanim were forewarned:

> "And God told Moshe: Go down and WARN the people that they must not break through [the barrier surrounding] Har Sinai, lest they gaze at Hashem and perish. The KOHANIM also, who COME NEAR HASHEM, must sanctify themselves ("yitkadashu" - compare "b'krovei akadesh"/10:3), lest God punish them." (Shmot 19:21)

As this inaugural ceremony parallels the events of Har Sinai, God's original warning concerning approaching Har Sinai, even for the KOHANIM, now applies to the Mishkan as well. Therefore, extra caution is necessary, no matter how good one's intentions may be. [See simi

BACK TO SEFER VAYIKRA

Now we can return to our original question. In Sefer Vayikra, the story of the sin of Nadav & Avihu (chapter 10) introduces an entire set of laws that discuss improper entry into the Mishkan (chapters 11->15). Then, immediately after this tragic event, the Sefer discusses the various laws of "tumah v'tahara", which regulate who is permitted and who is forbidden to enter the Mishkan. Only after the completion of this section discussing who can enter the Mishkan, does Sefer Vayikra return (in chapter 16) to God's command to Aharon concerning how he himself can properly enter the holiest sanctum of the Mikdash (on Yom Kippur).

In Part Two, we discuss the content of this special unit of mitzvot from chapter 11->15.

PART II

WHO CAN ENTER THE MISHKAN / TUMAH & TAHARA

INTRODUCTION

We often find ourselves lost in the maze of complicated laws concerning "tumah" and "tahara" which the Torah details in Parshiot TAZRIA & METZORA. Even though it is not easy to understand the reasoning for these laws, the internal structure of these Parshiot is quite easy to follow.

In Part II, we outline the flow of parshiot from Parshat Shmini through Metzora and attempt to explain why they are located specifically in this section of Sefer Vayikra.

THE UNIT

As the following table shows, each of these five chapters deals with a topic related in one form or manner to "tumah" (spiritual uncleanliness).

CHAPTER	"TUMAH" CAUSED BY:
11	eating or touching dead animals
12	the birth of a child
13	a "tzaraat" on a person's skin or garment
14	a "tzaraat" in a house
15	various emissions from the human body

Not only do these parshiot discuss how one contracts these various types of TUMAH, they also explain how one can cleanse himself from these TUMOT, i.e. how he becomes TAHOR. For the simplest type of TUMAH, one need only wash his clothing and wait until sundown (see 11:27-28,32,40). For more severe types of TUMAH, to become TAHOR one must first wait seven days and then bring a set of special korbanot.

This entire unit follows a very logical progression. It begins with the least severe type of TUMAH, known as "tumah erev" - one day TUMAH (lit. until the evening), and then continues with the more severe type of TUMAH, known as "tumah shiva", seven day TUMAH. Within each category, the Torah first explains how one contracts each type of TUMAH, then it explains the how he becomes TAHOR from it.

The following OUTLINE summarizes this structure. Note how each section of the outline concludes with a pasuk that begins with "zot torat...":

VAYIKRA - CHAPTERS 11 -> 15

==========

I. ONE DAY TUMAH - 11:1-47 / "v'tamey ad ha'erev"
[known as "tumat erev" (or "tumah kala")]
Person is TAMEY until nightfall/ see 11:24,25,27,31,32,39]
because he ate, touched, or carried the dead carcass of:
A. (11:1-28) forbidden animals and fowl
B. (29-38) one of the eight "shrutzim" (swarming creatures)
C. (39-40) permitted animals that died without "shchita"
D. (41-43) other creeping or swarming creatures.
TAHARA for the above - washing one's clothes/ 11:28,32,40]
FINALE psukim (11:44-47)

...ZOT TORAT HA'BHAYMA etc.

II. SEVEN DAY TUMAH - 12:1-15:33 ("tumah chamurah")
A. TUMAT YOLEDET - a mother who gave birth (12:1-8)
1. for a boy : 7+33=40
2. for a girl : 14+66=80

TAHARA - korban chatat & olah

...ZOT TORAT HA'YOLEDET etc.

B. TZARAAT HA'ADAM
TUMAH / based on inspection by the kohen
1. on one's body / 13:1-46
2. on one's "beged" (garment) /13:47-59
TAHARA / 14:1-32
1. special sprinkling, then count 7 days
2. special korban on eighth day

...ZOT TORAT ASHER BO NEGA TZARAAT etc.

C. TZARAAT HA'BAYIT / 14:33-53
TUMAH / based on inspection by kohen
1. the stones of the house itself (14:33-45)
2. secondary "tumah" (14:46-47) for one who:
a. enters the house
b. sleeps in the house
c. eats in the house
TAHARA - a special sprinkling on the house (14:48-53)
summary psukim for all types of TZARAAT (14:54-57)

...ZOT HA'TORAH L'CHOL NEGA HA'TZRAAT
... ZOT TORAT HA'TZARAAT.

D. EMISSIONS FROM THE BODY (chapter 15)
1. MALE - TUMAT ZAV - an abnormal emission of "zera"
a. he himself (15:1-4) - 7 days
b. secondary "tumah" / 1 day (15:5-12)
for one who either touches what the ZAV is sitting on, or
sits on an item that the ZAV sits, and other misc. cases.
TAHARA (15:13-15)
waiting 7 days, then washing with "mayim chayim"
on 8th day a special korban
2. MALE - TUMAT KERI - a normal emission (15:16-18)
one day "tumah" (until evening)
requires washing clothing.
3. FEMALE - TUMAT NIDA - a normal flow (15:19-24)
a. she herself - seven days
b. secondary "tumah" - one day
for person or items that she touches
4. FEMALE - TUMAT ZAVA - an abnormal flow (15:25-30)
a. she herself and what she sits on - 7 days
b. secondary "tumah" for someone who touches her or
something which she is sitting on.
TAHARA -
waiting seven days...
on 8th day a special korban
A FINALE and summary psukim (15:31-33)

...ZOT TORAT HA'ZAV etc.

==========

ABOUT THE OUTLINE

I recommend that you review this outline as you study the Parsha. Note that even though the details are very complicated, the overall structure is actually quite simple.

Note also how the Torah summarizes each section with a phrase beginning with ZOT TORAT... - this is the procedure (or ritual) for... [See the previous shiur on Parshat Tzav/Parah in which we discussed the meaning of the word TORAH in Sefer Vayikra.] The repetition of key phrases such as these is often helpful towards identifying the internal structure of parshiot in Chumash.

Our division of the outline into TWO sections, ONE-DAY tumah and SEVEN-DAY tumah may at first appear to be a bit misleading for we also find many cases of one day tumah in the second section. However, the cases of one-day TUMAH in the second section are quite different for they are CAUSED by a person who had first become TAMEY for seven days. Therefore, we have defined them as 'secondary' TUMAH in that section.

[TUMAT KERI (15:16-18) may be another exception since it is an independent one-day TUMAH, however it could be considered a sub-category within the overall framework of TUMAT ZAV.]

[See also further iyun section for a discussion why the one-day TUMAH section includes KASHRUT laws.]

WHY THE INTERRUPTION?

Now that we have established that chapters 11->15 form a distinct unit, which discusses the laws of TUMAH & TAHARA; we can return to our original question - Why does this unit interrupt the natural flow from Parshat Shmini (chapter 10) to Parshat Acharei Mot (chapter 16)?

The concluding psukim of this unit can provide us with a possible explanation.

As we have noted in our outline, this entire unit contains an important FINALE pasuk:

"V'HIZARTEM ET BNEI YISRAEL M'TUMATAM... And you shall put Bnei Yisrael on guard [JPS - see further iyun regarding translation of "vhizartem"] against their TUMAH, LEST THEY DIE through their TUMAH by defiling My MISHKAN which is among them." (see 15:31)

This pasuk connects the laws of TUMAH & TAHARA to the laws of the Mishkan. Bnei Yisrael must be careful that should they become TAMEY, they must not ENTER the Mishkan. In fact, the primary consequence for one who has become TAMEY is the prohibition that he cannot enter the MIKDASH complex. There is no prohibition against becoming TAMEY, rather only a prohibition against entering the Mishkan should he be TAMEY.

Hence, the entire TAHARA process as well is only necessary for one who wishes to enter the Mishkan. If there is no Mishkan, one can remain TAMEY his entire life with no other consequence (see further iyun section).

With this background, we can suggest a common theme for the first 16 chapters of Sefer Vayikra - the ability of Bnei Yisrael to enter the Mishkan, to come closer to God.

Let's explain:

The first section of Sefer Vayikra, chapters 1->7, explains HOW and WHEN the individual can bring a korban and HOW they are offered by the kohen. The next section, chapters 8->10, records the special Mishkan dedication ceremony, which prepared Bnei Yisrael and the Kohanim for using and working in the Mishkan. As this ceremony concluded with the death of Nadav & Avihu for improper entry into the Mishkan (when offering the "ktoret zara"), Sefer Vayikra continues with an entire set of commandments concerning TUMAH & TAHARA, chapters 11->15, which regulate who can and cannot ENTER THE MISHKAN. This unit ends with laws of Yom Kippur, which describe the procedure of how the "kohen gadol" (high

priest) can enter the most sacred domain of the Mishkan - the Kodesh K'doshim.

Even though these laws of TUMAH & TAHARA may have been given to Moshe at an earlier or later time, once again, we find that Sefer Vayikra prefers thematic continuity over chronological order (see shiur on Parshat Tzav). First, the Sefer discusses who cannot enter the Mishkan. Then it explains who can enter its most sacred domain.

ZEHIRUT - BEING CAREFUL

Up until this point, we have discussed the technical aspects of the structure of this unit in Parshiot Shmini, Tazria & Metzora. Is there any significance to these laws of TUMAH & TAHARA today as well?

The simplest explanation is based on our parallel between the Mishkan and Har Sinai. Just as Bnei Yisrael's encounter with God at Har Sinai required special preparation, so too man's encounter with God in the Mishkan. It would not be proper for man just to 'hop on in' whenever he feels like entering the Mishkan. Instead, each time an individual plans to offer a korban or enter the Mishkan for any other reason, he must prepare himself by making sure not to come in contact with anything which would make him TAMEY. Should for any reason he become TAMEY, he must wash his clothes and wait until the next day. Should he himself contract a major type of TUMAH such as TZARAAT or ZAV, then he must wait at least seven days and undergo a special ritual which will make him TAHOR.

All of these complicated laws cause the man who wishes to visit the Mishkan to be very careful and constantly aware of everything he touches, or carries, etc. during the entire week prior to his visit, thus enhancing his spiritual readiness for entering the Mishkan.

Today, even without a Mishkan, man must still make every effort to find God's Presence, even though it is hidden. Therefore, man's state of constant awareness and caution concerning everything that he says and does remains a primary means by which man can come closer to God, even though no Bet Ha'Mikdash exists.

An important though to keep in mind as we prepare ourselves during the seven weeks of Sefirat ha'Omer in preparation for our commemoration of Ma'amad Har Sinai on Shavuot.

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In relation to the translation of the word "v'hizartem et Bnei Yisrael..." (15:31), see Ibn Ezra. He explains that the word does not stem from "azhara"=warning, but rather from the word "nazir", to separate oneself ["zarut"]. Then "nun" simply falls which is noted by the dagesh in the "zayin". See Ibn Ezra inside!

B. Since this section of chapters 11->15 discuss various laws of TUMAH & TAHARA, one would expect it to include the laws of TUMAT MEYT (caused by touching a dead person). Instead, the Torah records these laws in Parshat Chukat, Bamidbar chapter 19. It appears as though that parsha was 'spliced' from this unit and 'transferred' to Sefer Bamidbar. This parsha is one of many parshiot in Sefer Bamidbar which would appear to 'belong' in Sefer Vayikra instead. Iy"h, we will explain the reason for this in our shiurim on Sefer Bamidbar - "v'akmal".

C. At first glance, the section in our unit which discusses 'one-day' TUMAH (chapter 11) appears to be discussing "kashrut" (dietary laws) more than TUMAH, for it details which animals are permitted or forbidden to be eaten. However, the dietary laws which are mentioned here because one becomes TAMEY should he eat the meat of an animal which is TAMEY.

To prove this, simply compare this parsha to the dietary laws in Parshat Re'ay (see Dvarim 14:1-21). There we find only dietary laws and not laws of TUMAH & TAHARA. Therefore, laws such as "basar v'chalav" are mentioned in that parsha, while the laws of TUMAH are not!

D. These laws which discuss who can and cannot enter the Mikdash are sometimes referred to as HILCHOT BIYAT MIKDASH (see Rambam Sefer Avodah). Obviously, these laws apply only when a Mikdash exists, as there is no other consequence of 'becoming tamey' other than limited entry to areas containing shchinah.

Nonetheless, there are several circumstances when it is still necessary to know these laws. For example, entering HAR HA'BAYIT even when there is not Mikdash requires that one not be TAMEY. These laws also relate to eating TRUMOT & MAASROT.

E. See 11:44-45
"...v'hitkadishtem, v'yehiytem KDOSHIM, ki KADOSH ani"
v'lo t'TAMU et nafshoteichem...."
"ki ani Hashem ha'maale etchem m'eretz mitzrayim,
l'hiyot l'chem l'Elokim, v'heyitem KDOSHIM ..."
"... l'havdil bein ha'tamey u'bein ha'tahor..."

This finale of the section explaining 'one-day' TUMAH connects the theme of Sefer Shmot, that Hashem took us out Egypt in order that we become His nation, to the laws of "tumah & tahara". To become God's nation, we must be like Him. Just as He is "kadosh" (set aside, different), we must also be "kadosh".

Man's spirituality begins with his recognition that he is different than animal. Although man and animal are similar in many ways, man must realize that he was set aside by God for a higher purpose. God blessed man with special qualities in order that he fulfill that purpose. [See Rambam in Moreh Nvuchim I.1 regarding the definition of tzelem elokim. It is not by coincidence that the Rambam begins Moreh Nvuchim with this concept.]

These laws of "tumat ochlim" teach Am Yisrael that they must differentiate between man and animal, and between different types of animals. By doing so, man will learn to differentiate between divine and mundane, between "tamey & tahor", and finally between good and bad, right and wrong etc.

D. In previous shiurim, we explained how the cycles of seven found in Chumash relate to our need to recognize the hand of God behind nature. Why do you think that we also find cycles of seven in the laws of TZARAAT, ZAV, and ZAVA that appear to be the exact opposite, that is abnormalities in nature?

PARSHAT TAZRIA - From 7 to 8
[& for Shmini Atzeret]

What is so special about the number 'eight' in Chumash? Is it only coincidental that:

* In Sefer Breishit - specifically the 'eighth day' is chosen for Brit Milah;
* In Parshat Shmini - specifically the 'eighth day' is chosen for the dedication of the Mishkan;
* In Parshat Metzora - the 'eighth day' is chosen for the day on which the cleansed Metzora, Zav, and Zavah bring their special korbanot;
* In Parshat Emor - the final holiday is "SHMINI atzeret" - the 'eighth day' of Succot!

In the following shiur, we attempt to explain why the number eight is so special, based on the Biblical significance of the number seven.

INTRODUCTION

In previous shiurim we have discussed the special relationship between the Number SEVEN and 'nature', especially in regard to the "shalosh regalim" [the three pilgrimage holidays]. For example, in our shiur our Parshat Emor we noted that is not by chance that the Torah commands us to:

* Celebrate specifically SEVEN days of Chag Ha'matzot in the **spring**; and then -
* To count SEVEN weeks until the **grain harvest** holiday of Shavuot; and finally -
* To celebrate our **fruit harvest** during the SEVEN days of Succot.

The fact that each of these holidays include either seven days or seven weeks suggests a connection between the number seven and agriculture. By emphasizing SEVEN in relation to these agricultural holidays, the Torah highlights our need to recognize that the powers of nature are indeed God's creation, and we must thank Him accordingly.

Similarly, our shiur on Parshat Breishit discussed how the Torah presents of the story of Creation as taking place in SEVEN days – to emphasize how the very creation of 'nature' itself was a willful act of the One God - and not the result of conflicts among a pantheon of many gods, each exerting its power over a certain part of nature.

In the following shiur, we return to Sefer Breishit in search of the biblical significance of the number 'eight', to show how and why it should relate to those 'seven' days of Creation.

EIGHT & BRIT MILAH

In some of the examples quoted above from Sefer Vayikra, 'eight' appears to be significant simply because it follows a sequence of 'seven' days. For example:

* "Yom Ha'shmini" follows the SEVEN days of the "miluim";
* The korbanot on the eighth day of the Metzora and Zav follow their minimum SEVEN day "tahara" period;
* "Shmini Atzeret" follows the SEVEN days of Succot.

However, when God first commanded Avraham Avinu that "brit milah" must be performed on the 'eighth day' after a child's birth (see Breishit 17:12) - there is no apparent reason why God chose specifically the 'eighth day'. Certainly, it had nothing to do with a prior period of 'seven days' (as did the other examples of a special 'eighth day' mentioned above).

[Even though we are told in Parshat Tazria that the mother is "tamey" (spiritually unclean) for the first seven days after her son's birth (see Vayikra 12:2-5), there does not appear to be any logical connection between these seven days and the commandment to perform "milah' on the eighth day that was first given way back in Sefer Breishit. In fact, it seems quite the opposite - that because brit milah needs to be performed on the eighth day, her 'tumah' period is 'truncated' from 14 days to seven days.]

In the following shiur, we re-examine this covenant between God and Avraham Avinu [17:1-11/ better known as "brit milah"] in the 'wider' context of Sefer Breishit - to uncover a thematic connection between the 'eighth day' and the 'seven days' of Creation. [Hopefully, it will help us understand not only why "milah" is on the 'eighth day', but also why the holiday of "Shmini Atzeret" is so important.]

As you most probably recall, the Torah uses several names to describe God (e.g. Elokim, Havaya, kel-shaddai, etc.). However, when the narrative of "brit milah" begins in chapter 17, something very peculiar takes place, as God introduces Himself to Avraham Avinu for the first time as "kel-shaddai" - after which the Torah consistently refers to God as "Elokim" (until the end of that chapter).

To appreciate the thematic importance of this observation, we must first undertake a quick review of all the previous instances in Sefer Breishit when God spoke to man, paying special attention to when the Torah uses "shem Elokim".

IN WHAT 'NAME' DOES GOD SPEAK TO MAN?

In our shiur on Parshat Breishit, we explained how Chumash presents two parallel stories of God's creation of the universe:

1) "b'shem ELOKIM" (1:1 -2:4) - [or 'perek aleph'] which focused on God's creation of NATURE, i.e. a structured universe, in SEVEN days.

2) "b'shem HAVAYA" (2:5-4:26) - [or 'perek bet'] which focused on God's special relationship with Man, i.e. the creation of Gan Eden, and man's banishment from that environment after he sinned.

Without going into the complex details and deeper meaning of this 'double presentation', we will simply posit that God's relationship with man develops along the lines of each of these two perspectives, as each of these divine Name will reflect a different perspective of the developing relationship between man and God.

For example, in perek aleph, God - b'shem Elokim - blesses man that he be fruitful & multiply, master the earth and rule over all other living creatures (see 1:26-28). In contrast to this perspective of man as ruler over God's Creations, in perek bet - b'shem Havaya -man is created in order to become God's servant, whose job is to tend and watch over His Garden (see 2:15-17).

This 'double perspective' is found once again in the Torah's account of the Flood, as God's decision to destroy the generation of the Flood (due to their sinful behavior) is presented according to both of these perspectives:

1) b'shem Elokim - see 6:9-6:22.
2) b'shem Havaya - see 6:5-8 & 7:1-5.

Likewise, in the aftermath of the MABUL, God redefines His relationship with man, again from both perspectives:

1) b'shem Elokim - see 9:1-17
2) b'shem Havaya - see 8:18-21

After the flood, the Torah describes ["b'shem Elokim"] how the children of Noach multiply and disperse into seventy nations (10:1-32), but immediately afterwards details God's punishment of the builders of the Tower of Babel while referring to God using "shem Havaya" (see 11:1-10).

At this point in Chumash (i.e. at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha) this pattern (of 'double presentation') seems to end - for the Torah uses exclusively "shem Havaya" as it describes all the conversations between God and Avraham Avinu, from chapter 12 thru chapter 16. The Torah's exclusive use of "shem Havaya" to describe these encounters is thematically consistent with our assertion that God's Name of "Havaya" relates to the special relationship between man and God - where man is expected to act as a servant of God.

For example, God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation is described b'shem Havaya (see 12:1-9); so too His re-iteration of that promise after Lot's departure (see 13:14-17).

Similarly, when God formalizes that promise into a covenant in "brit bein ha'btarim" (see 15:1-20) - again we find the Torah's employs "shem Havaya" in its description of God.

For some reason, this exclusive (and logical) use of "shem Havaya" in the Torah's description of God's relationship with Avraham Avinu changes in chapter seventeen - when the Torah

first uses "shem Elokim" to describe how God speaks to Avraham Avinu at "brit milah"!

To understand the reason for this sudden change, let's take a closer look at how that chapter begins, noticing how God first introduces Himself as "kel sha-dai" before speaking to him b'shem ELOKIM:

> "When Avram was ninety-nine years, God [HAVAYA] appeared to Avram and said to him: "ANI KEL SHA-DAI", walk before Me and be blameless. And I will establish My COVENANT between Me and you... Avram fell on his face, and God [ELOKIM] spoke to him saying... This is my COVENANT with you..." (17:1-4)

As you study these psukim, and the ones that follow, note how God (b'shem Elokim):

a) changes Avram's name to Avraham;
b) blesses him that he will multiply ("pru u'rvu");
c) promises that he will become a great nation;
d) promises him and his future generations Eretz Canaan;
e) promises to be his God ("le'hiyot l'cha l'ELOKIM");
f) commands him to circumcise his male children, etc.

In addition to these details in these psukim, pay attention as well to their style - as they share some very interesting similarities to the only two earlier instances where Chumash uses " shem Elokim" to describe God speaking to man:

(I) After the creation of man on the sixth day (1:27-30);
(II) After the Flood (see 9:1-17).

To verify this, review those two sets of psukim, noting the parallels to the narrative of "brit milah":

I) On the sixth day, after man is created b'tzelem ELOKIM, God (b'shem ELOKIM) blesses him that he should:
   a) be fruitful and multiply ("pru u'rvu");
   b) be master and ruler of the living kingdom;
   c) eat from the plants and fruit of the trees.

II) Some ten generations later, after the Flood, God (b'shem ELOKIM) blesses Noach and his children in a very similar fashion (9:1-7), including:
   a) to be fruitful and multiply ("pru u'rvu");
   b) to be master of the living kingdom;
   c) permission to eat living creatures (not only plants);

However, the most striking parallel to "brit milah" is found in the special covenant that God ["b'shem Elokim"] makes with Noach immediately after these blessings as described in 9:8-12:

> "vhakimoti et briti itchem... [9:11/ compare 17:7-8]
>
> "va'yomer Elokim, zot ot ha'brit..." [19:12/ compare 17:9-10]

This covenant, better known as "brit ha'keshet" (the rainbow covenant), reflects the establishment of a special relationship between God and mankind, as God promises that He will never again bring about the total destruction of His Creation. [See 9:11-15 / see also Ramban on 6:18, especially his final explanation of the word "brit", based on the word "briya"!]

It is rather amazing that the next time that God speaks to man b'shem Elokim is only some ten generations later - at Brit Milah, when He challenges Avraham Avinu to accept yet another covenant. Note the striking textual similarities between these two covenants, i.e. "brit Milah" and "brit ha'keshet":

a) to be fruitful and multiply 9:1 / 17:2,6;
c) "v'hakimoti et briti..." 9:11 / 17:7;
d) "ha'aterz" // "eretz canaan" 9:13,16,17 / 17:8
e) "ot brit": "ha'milah // ha'keshet" 9:13,17/ 17:12;
[to verify this, open your Tanach & compare them yourself]

However, in addition to these similarities, in "brit Milah" we find an additional, yet very important promise - "l'hiyot lachem l'Elokim" [to be a God for you"] - reflecting a much CLOSER relationship with God. In fact, this key phrase is repeated twice, for it emphasizes and defines the purpose of Brit Milah (read 17:7-8 carefully!).

ONE STEP 'ABOVE' NATURE

With this background, we can suggest a reason for why God [b'shem Elokim] commands Avraham to perform "brit milah" specifically on the eighth day.

Note the progression that has emerged as we followed God's relationship with man, from the perspective of 'shem Elokim':
STAGE 1) The Creation of NATURE in SEVEN days (1:1-2:4);
STAGE 2) The covenant with Noach after the Flood (9:1-17);
STAGE 3) The "Brit Milah" covenant with Avraham Avinu to be performed on the EIGHTH day (17:1-14).

One could suggest that circumcision on the EIGHTH day relates to this elevation of man's spiritual level, ONE step above the level of his original creation in SEVEN days.

Let's explain this statement, based on the three stages of this progression b'shem Elokim:

(1) During the first seven days, God brought the universe to a stage of development where it appears to 'take care of itself'. Be it vegetation, animal, or man, all species of life secure their existence by their ability to reproduce; they become fruitful and multiply (e.g. "zo'ray'ah zerah", "zachar u'nekeyvah", "pru u'rvu", etc.). Man's mastery of this creation, his desire to conquer and his ability to harness it, are all part of this phenomenon that we call NATURE. The first chapter of Breishit teaches us that [what we refer to as] nature, did not just happen by chance, rather it was a willful act of God. [By resting on Shabbat, once every seven days, we remind ourselves of this point.]

(2) After the "mabul", God (b'shem Elokim) 'starts over' by re-establishing His relationship with mankind in a covenant with Noach, known as "brit ha'keshet". This covenant reflects a relationship very similar to that in God's original creation in seven days, with some 'minor' changes: Man remains master of His universe (9:2), with a 'small change' in his diet (9:3-5), and a commandment that it is forbidden to murder a fellow human (9:6-7). However, the basic laws of nature remain the same (see 9:8).

(3) Up until Brit Milah, man's relationship with God b'shem Elokim remained distant. Although Man was the pinnacle of God's creation with certain minimal expectations of moral behavior, he was basically just part of nature. Man was given power; he acted like God (b'tzelem Elokim), but was not CLOSE to Him. At Brit Milah, Avraham is raised to a higher level. He and his offspring are chosen to represent God as His special nation, and towards that purpose, they are awarded a special relationship with God, as they are now destined to represent Him, i.e. -"li'hiyot lachem l'Elokim".

Then, as an "ot" [a sign] to symbolize this relationship, they are commanded to circumcise their children on the '**eighth** day'. Hence, "milah" specifically on the EIGHTH day may reflect this additional level in the creation process, which first took place in SEVEN days. [What the Maharal refers to as "m'al ha'teva - above nature!]

In other words, the eighth day can be understood as representative of one final stage of the creation process. Just as the seven days of Creation - b'shem Elokim] - included a progression from "domem" (the inanimate objects / i.e. "shmayim v'aretz"); to "tzomayach" (vegetation); to "chai" (the animal kingdom); to "adam" (man) - the 'eighth day' reflects how man has been elevated to a higher level in his relationship with God.

To elevate Creation to a higher awareness of God's existence, a special covenant is made with the offspring of Avraham, and we remind ourselves of this covenant specifically by performing "brit Milah" on the eighth day after a child's birth.

[This interpretation could reflect a statement made by Reish Lakish, explaining the meaning of God's name "kel sha-dai" which is first introduced at Brit Milah (see 17:1-2):

What's the meaning of "ani kel-sha'dai"? God said: I am the One who said to the world "dai" - enough, or stop]."

(see Yalkut Shimoni siman 81, Chagiga 12a)

[See also commentary of the "Torah Tmima" on this pasuk.]

This explanation may help us understand the complexity in the opening lines of the Brit Milah narrative: God, b'shem Havaya - the Name of God which Avraham is familiar with up until this point - informs Avraham that He is "kel sha-dai", the God who had 'stopped' His process of creation after seven days (17:1-2). Now, b'shem Elokim, the Name of God that orchestrated the creation in seven days, intervenes yet one more time. He establishes a covenant with Avraham, to command him with the mitzvah of "brit milah", to raise him ONE level higher, i.e. closer to God.

Thus, God's commandment that we perform Brit Milah on the eighth day is not incidental. Rather, it reflects the very nature of our special relationship with God. In fact, one could suggest that God's relationship with His nation now becomes part of 'the nature of the universe'. Just as the sun will always rise and set, so too, Am Yisrael will always be His nation to represent him (see Yirmiyahu 33:19-26); as reflected by the Torah's use of "shem Elokim".:

With this background, let's return to the various examples of this '7 - 8' relationship in Sefer Vayikra, as "brit milah" on the eighth day was only one example.

SEVEN DAYS "MILUIM" / "YOM HA'SHMINI":

As explained in our shiur on Parshat Shmini, the seven days necessary to dedicate the Mishkan reflect the parallel between Bnei Yisrael's construction of the Mishkan to serve God, to God's creation of nature in seven days, to serve Him. [See Tehillim 104 - "borchi nafshi..."!]

Then, on the 'eighth day' ["yom ha'shmini"], God commands Bnei Yisrael to offer a special set of korbanot - in anticipation of His "shchinah" that will descend upon the Mishkan - reflecting the return of God's presence. In this manner, the Mishkan now becomes the focal point for the development of the special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael, just as "brit milah" on the eighth day was a sign of that special covenant.

SEVEN DAYS "TAHARA" / EIGHTH DAY "KORBANOT" (Metzora, Zav, Zava):

Different types of "tumah" are caused by some abnormal behavior of the body. Seven days of "tahara" are required to return the "tamei" person back to the 'camp' - to his normal existence, his natural habitat. Then on the eighth day, he must bring a special korban to allow his entry into the Mishkan.

[Note the parallel between this process, and its korbanot, to that of the kohanim during the seven-day miluim and Yom ha'Shmini.]

SEVEN DAYS OF SUCCOT / SHMINI ATZERET:

As agriculture and nature go hand in hand, all of the agricultural holidays follow cycles of seven (see Vayikra chapter 23). In the spring (chag ha'aviv), as the grain harvest begins, we bring "korban ha'omer" and celebrate chag ha'matzot for SEVEN days. Then we count SEVEN WEEKS until the completion of the wheat harvest, bring "korban shtei ha'lechem", and celebrate chag ha'SHAVUOT. On succot, "chag ha'asif", at the end of the agricultural year ("b'tzeit ha'shana /see Shmot 23:16), we thank God for our fruit harvest by celebrating for seven days and bringing the "arba minim" to the Mikdash.

At the very end of this cycle of agricultural holidays, we add SHMINI ATZERET, a special gathering with no special agricultural mitzvah. It is simply a time to stop and reflect on the holiday season and year that has passed. On this 'eighth day', we focus on the special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael.

This special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael that began with Brit Milah, reaches its fullest expression with Matan Torah with Brit Sinai.

Based on this interpretation, it is understandable why Chazal chose this holiday to celebrate as SIMCHAT TORAH, and to conclude on this day the yearly 'cycle' of reading the Torah.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In what way could Shavuot be considered the "eighth", after seven cycles of seven. Compare this to the din of the Yovel year in parshat B'har. Why do you think that Chazal refer to Shavuot as "chag ha'atzeret". In what way is it similar to "Shmini Atzeret".

B. Based on the above shiur, why do you think that prior to Brit Milah, God changes both Avraham's and Sarah's names by adding a "hey"? Relate your answer to Hashem's name and His introduction in 17:1-4.

C. Based on the parallels between creation and brit milah, why do you think God chose to make the "ot" of this covenant on the part of the body which performs "pru u'rvu".

Explain why we thank God in birchat ha'mazon for the "aretz", then "britcha asher chatamta bi'bsareinu", and then toratcha sh'limad'tanu"

D. Note in Sefer Yirmiyahu that even the Creation itself is considered a covenant: see 33:25-26, and relate these psukim to the above shiur.

E. Relate the above shiur to the minhag of "sheva brachot" at a wedding, and the seven days of mourning after death.

F. See Rambam Hilchot M'lachim chapter nine [the laws concerning the SEVEN mitzvot of Bnei Noach]. Relate this Rambam to the above shiur.

Parshas Tazria/Metzora: Jewish Statehood (I)

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. TZARA'AT HABAYIT

After presenting the various laws dealing with Tzara'at (scale diseases) and the purification rituals which accompany them, the Torah presents the laws of Tzara'at haBayit (scale diseases on the walls of houses):

And Hashem spoke to Mosheh and to Aharon, saying, When you come to the land of K'na'an, which I give to you for a possession, and I put the disease of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession; And he who owns the house shall come and tell the Kohen, saying, It seems to me there is a disease in the house; Then the Kohen shall command that they empty the house, before the Kohen goes into it to see the disease… And the Kohen shall come again the seventh day, and shall look; and, behold, if the disease has spread over the walls of the house; Then the Kohen shall command that they take away the stones in which the disease is, and they shall throw them into an unclean place outside the city; And he shall cause the house to be scraped inside around, and they shall pour out the dust that they scraped outside the city into an unclean place; And they shall take other stones, and put them in the place of those stones; and he shall take other mortar, and shall plaster the house. And if the disease comes again, and break out in the house, after he has taken away the stones, and after he has scraped the house, and after it is plastered; Then the Kohen shall come and look, and, behold, if the disease has spread in the house, it is a malignant Tzara'at in the house; it is unclean. And he shall break down the house, its stones, and its timber, and all the mortar of the house; and he shall carry them out of the city into an unclean place…This is the Torah for all kinds of Tzara'at, and patch, and for the leprosy of a garment, and of a house, and for a swelling, and for a scab, and for a bright spot; to teach when it is unclean, and when it is clean; this is the Torah of Tzara'at. (Vayyikra 14:33-57)

The first statement which strikes any student about this Parashah is that, unlike the Torah of Tzara'at presented relating to persons and clothes (chapter 13), the Tzara'at haBayit seems to be a "promise", rather than a contingency (When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a swelling, a scab, or bright spot, and it is on the skin of his flesh like the disease of Tzara'at; then he shall be brought to Aharon haKohen…).

The Midrash (cited, with variations, by Rashi at 14:34) explains the "promise" as follows:

R. Hiyya taught: Was this a harbinger for them, to tell them that they would have plagues in their houses? R. Shim'on bar Yohai taught: Once the K'na'anim heard that Yisra'el are coming to war against them, they hid their money in their homes and fields. HaKadosh Barukh Hu said: I promised their fathers that I would bring them into a Land filled with all manners of good, as it says: And houses full of all good things; what did haKadosh Barukh Hu do? He causes plagues to come into the [Yisra'eli's] house, whereupon he razes it, finding a treasure there. (Vayyikra Rabbah 17:6)

There is something a bit disconcerting about this explanation: If God's intent was merely to expose the K'na'ani's hidden treasure to His people, thus fulfilling the promise of bringing us to a Land of houses full of all good things, why the need for a scaly plague in the house? Why not simply command us to destroy the houses, or to remove the stones etc. in order to find the treasures? (See Hizkuni at 14:34; in a diametrically opposite perspective of that suggested by the Midrash, he associates the command to destroy these houses with the command to uproot pagan worship sites. To wit, God is showing us where the "secret" worship sites are and helping us to uproot them by bringing a scabrous plague on those houses.)

I'd like to ask two further questions on this Parashah:

2) What is the rationale behind the sequence of Tzara'at presented in the Torah: personal scale-disease, Tzara'at haBeged (scale disease on clothes) and finally Tzara'at haBayit?

3) Why must the owner of the house turn to the Kohen for help in ferreting out the Tzara'at of the house (or, for that matter, of his person or his clothes)?

Since the direction we will adopt in responding to these questions relates both to the unique nature of Eretz Yisra'el and the special demands of Jewish Statehood, we will take a long detour and examine some of the more recent developments (the last couple of centuries worth) in the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisra'el. Although this essay will cover three Mikra postings, each issue will focus on a separate component of the issue as it relates to that week's Parashah (or Parashiot); those questions will be "provisionally" answered at the end of each issue, with a summary of all of the points in the final installment.

II. FROM MOURNING TO CELEBRATION

The season between Pesach and Lag b'Omer has, of late, become a time not only for celebration (in some circles), but also of reflection and commemoration (also, sadly, only in some circles – more on this anon). Since the modern state of Israel was declared on that historic Erev Shabbat of May 15, 1948, the twinned days of Yom haZikkaron (Israel Memorial Day – Iyyar 4) and Yom ha'Atzma'ut (Iyyar 5) have been the occasion for many intense feelings among the citizens of our State. Heart-wrenching visits to military cemeteries and moments in silence throughout the country mark the former; while great celebrations involving communal dancing and singing highlight the latter – along with appropriate national ceremonies to accompany each day.

A significant segment of the religious population has fully participated in the "new rituals" associated with each of these

commemorative days – along with enhancing each of them with Halakhically-oriented "old rituals" to express, more traditionally, the great and deep feelings which each of these monumental days evokes.

I would like to address two issues in this essay which relate, very directly, to the tone of these commemorative days as we prepare to move into our second half-century of Statehood.

First of all, as noted above, it is only a segment of the Torah-committed population which identifies with (and participates in) these national celebrations. It is worth our while to investigate why the "Torah world" has not fully embraced the opportunity to mark these days in a significant manner. This question itself will be dealt with in two separate – yet interdependent – studies. Why does a significant plurality (if not outright majority) of the "Shomer Shabbat" community in Israel virtually ignore the significance of these days? In responding to this question, we will see that there is no one answer which accurately reflects the Hashkafah of the many schools of thought which are, by dint of their non-celebration, grouped together in the eyes of the Israeli public (religious as well as secular). Independently, we may wish to ask why so much of the Orthodox community outside of Israel (especially in North America) allow these two days to go by without so much as a mention? To so many members of the religious community (including a not-insignificant portion of our readership), this question is a non-starter. We will investigate why this is the case further on, along with suggesting why the question, at the very least, needs to be asked, specifically within those communities.
The second issue, which may appear to be totally unrelated to the first, is the spirit which animates the State, the Zionist movement (if such could be said to exist at all) and the celebration of Statehood in this, the 52nd year of Medinat Yisra'el. How far have we come towards realizing the dreams which drove our brothers and sisters of the last two generations to drain swamps, pave roads, patrol borders and make the desert bloom? Is there anything left of that dream today? Has the contemplative sobriety of Yom haZikkaron invaded the celebratory tone of Yom ha'Atzma'ut so that we no longer feel that we have anything to celebrate?

This may sound like a curious question; unfortunately, a recent change in the "public face" of Israel nearly provides an automatic response in the negative to the former question and an affirmative one to the latter.

Succinctly put, how close is the vision which created our State to the reality experienced by her citizens today? Is it at all possible to speak of a "shared vision" within the various segments of the Jewish population? (a proper analysis of the role of the Arab population in Medinat Yisra'el is beyond the scope of this essay – as well as beyond the ken of the author). Is there a vision which can include the entire "world of Torah"?
As noted, these questions do not necessarily seem to be of one cloth and one would rightly anticipate separate analyses. I believe, however, that there is an underlying question which informs all of these issues, the resolution of which, more to our point, may be the foundation around which a satisfactory (and satisfying) direction may be found.

At the outset, let me admit that this undertaking is too great for even Mikra-postings. I readily confess that it seems presumptuous to suggest that a "great foundation" can be presented in these pages which will accomplish what no end of pundits, rabbis, political advisors and community leaders have failed to generate. Yet every one of us is called to contribute our best to K'lal Yisra'el, even if it falls short of the contributions made by others. Perhaps the suggestions raised in these pages will provide some food for thought which will stimulate further discussion in the cause of Am Yisra'el b'Eretz Yisra'el…t'he zot s'chari.

III. POLITICAL ZIONISM AND ITS RECENT PRECURSORS

Generally speaking, when we refer to the "Zionist dream", reference is made to that specific vision shared by the progenitors of the Zionist movement of the late 19th century. Ardent socialists who found that they could not built their utopia in Eastern Europe, they directed their energies towards our ancient homeland, Palestine. They were avowed secularists, whose Zionism was as much the product of their disaffection from the established (read: religious) Jewish community (as they were swept along in the exhilaration of the Enlightenment) as it was an outgrowth of their "Jewish roots". They envisioned a Jewish state that would offer all that is noble about Judaism – essentially the finest of Western culture and academia – to the world and would be a haven where all Jews could come to participate in that great enterprise. The great ideals of socialism would be realized on Jewish native soil, as the Jewish people would achieve their destiny of being a "light unto the nations." Since this is not chiefly a historic piece, I will not include here a summary of the development of the Zionism movement, the various Congresses etc. Suffice it to say that the vision shared by these early Zionists was not infused with – or even informed by – Torah sensibilities. Political Zionism was very much the daughter of the Zeitgeist of the second half of the last century and, as such, was caught up with the heady arrogance of that exciting time. There was no need for the "old ways", so closely identified with the mentality of "Galut". A "new Jew" was going to be created; a Jew unbound by centuries of tradition and belief, a "modern" Jew who would be able to sit at the table (literally as well as figuratively) with the member of any other nation and look at him as an equal.

Surprising as most Jews would find it, these hardy socialists were not the only Jews to "make Aliyah" in the 19th century – nor were they the first.

Religious Jews had been living in Eretz Yisra'el for nearly a century before the first Zionist Congress took place in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. Truth to tell, there were small (but not at all insignificant) communities of Jews in Israel who had been there for countless generations – some claiming that they never left!

At the beginning of the 19th century, followers of the Vilna Ga'on (d. 1797) and R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady (the first Lubavitcher Rebbe – d. 1813) made Aliyah. In both cases, unlike the communities which had been there for several centuries, these new Olim saw themselves as the vanguard of the Mashiach. In a lengthy treatise, Kol haTor, authored by

R. Hillel of Sh'klov, the Vilna Ga'on's many teachings regarding the special nature of the times and the steps needed to be taken to inspire the coming of the Mashiach are outlined. The students of the Ga'on settled in Tz'fat and Yerushalayim; whereas the main Habad community was in Hevron.

Along with these "Messianic activists" (more on this term later), there were communities of representatives of many of the European communities in Yerushalayim. As their representatives, their task was fully devotional – to study and pray in the holy city, accepting their material support from their home/host community abroad. Although this system had only become popular in the 1700s, there are examples of this type of "representative/devotional" Aliyah dating back to the Middle Ages.

In any case, it is clear that both a personal connection with the Land of Israel and a sense that this was an auspicious time to settle the Land were not sentiments exclusively felt within the secular community of Jewish socialists.

So far, we have seen three motivating factors for people to want to move to Eretz Yisra'el – only one of which would necessarily involve political sovereignty and statehood:

1) A place for Jews to implement the socialist visions sweeping across Western and Central Europe – in a Jewish milieu;

2) As a somewhat mechanistic activity designed to both hasten the coming of Mashiach and to be properly prepared for his advent.

3) To reside in the Holy Land, preferably within the Holy City, studying Torah and praying to God.

(To be sure, there were always Jews who were motivated to "make Aliyah" for other reasons. The story is told that R. Hayyim Brisker, one of the most ardent and outspoken opponents of Political Zionism desired to move to Israel, plant an orchard and, thereby, be able to fulfill the various Mitzvot which obtain exclusively in the Land. He never realized his dream.)

With the organization of "Zionism" as a political movement at the end of the century, however, religious sentiments regarding the Land of Israel decidedly cooled. That is not to say that interst in the fate of Eretz Yisra'el waned; but vehement opposition to the Zionists and anything associated with their program led to an almost wholesale refusal on the part of rabbinic authorities to have anything to do with their efforts. Whatever judgment the Ribbono Shel Olam may have passed on this question – He is, after all, the sole arbiter in historic questions (see Rav Yoseph D. Soloveitchik, Hamesh D'rashot, p. 23), the outspoken antagonism of most of the Rabbinic collegium throughout Eastern Europe is easily understood. Not only were the Zionists avowedly secular, they also planned to build their own (avowedly secular) state on holy ground!

Although the "Messianic activist" school continued to have capable spokesmen, (e.g. R. Yehudah Alkalai, R. Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer), the influence of this movement had waned by the time Political Zionism's message was publicized. This set the scene for the two leaders – one political and the other a visionary – who did more than anyone (before or since) to change the relationship between Zionism and the world of Torah-committed Jews: Rabbi Yitzchak Ya'akov Reines and Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook. We will begin next week's installment with a brief survey of their programmatic and policy agendae relating to the resettlement of Eretz Yisra'el. In the meantime, here are the "provisional" answers to the questions posited above.

IV. THE UNIQUE DEMANDS OF JEWISH STATEHOOD

The Rishonim note that, unlike personal Tzara'at and that afflicting clothing, Tzara'at haBayit is directly and exclusively related to houses in Eretz Yisra'el. Ibn Ezra (14:34) states that: "For this only applies in the Land, on account of the superior nature of the Land, because the Mikdash is among them and the Glory is in the Mikdash." In other words, the afflictions which plague the houses are only considered significant in the Land, due to the Glory of God manifest there.

The Land is, indeed and just as God promised us, filled with all manner of good things. And the gold of that Land is good – teaching that there is no Torah like the Torah of Eretz Yisra'el and there is no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisra'el. (B'resheet Rabbah 16:4) But those great goods can only be realized when Am Yisra'el achieves its destiny, not operating as a an amalgamation of pious individuals, but as a kingdom of Kohanim and holy nation. Building a nation, overcoming the tribal and sectarian considerations which animate a nation of recently liberated slaves (or a people long exiled from their Land) takes much serious work and there are no easy solutions to the many dilemmas which face national leaders:

It has been taught: R. Shim'on b. Yohai says: haKadosh Barukh Hu gave Yisra'el three precious gifts, and all of them were given only through sufferings. These are: The Torah, Eretz Yisra'el and the world to come. (BT Berakhot 5a)

The goodness of Eretz Yisra'el, the beauty of a national entity which reflects most perfectly the ideals of God's Torah, is a job which takes much digging and hard work – and necessitates the overcoming of great afflictions and obstacles. Had God merely directed us to the hidden gold of the K'na'anim, we would have mistakenly thought that nation building – "building our house" – is an easy task. We would not even have had to build, just inherit a previously built house, with gold and silver waiting for us. Tzara'at haBayit teaches us that it is specifically when we are faced with plagues, with scaly walls and moldy bricks, that we are called not to look away but to root them out – for that is exactly how our firmest foundations will be built and the greatest riches will be unearthed.

Who is qualified to direct this search for national treasures? Which type of leader has the mandate to address the "plagues

of the house" and identify how best to clean them out? It is the Kohen, whose function is most eloquently described by Malakhi as follows:
For the Kohen's lips should guard knowledge, and they should seek the Torah from his mouth; for he is a messenger of Hashem T'zakot. (Malakhi 2:7)

Why, then, does the Torah first present "personal" afflictions, then afflictions relating to clothing, only concluding with Tzara'at haBayit?
Great nationalist movements have often placed such an overwhelming stress on the success and weal of the group that the moral development of the individual – as well as his welfare – have no place in the national agenda. Jewish nation-building, conversely, is a process of balancing the needs of the individual (the P'rat) against those of the community (the K'lal).

In order to build a righteous nation, which can serve as a theistic-ethical beacon for the nations of the world, we need to insure that the individual members of the group are successfully facing their own "plagues" ("personal" Tzara'at) , as well as those which affect their interactions with others (Tzara'at haBeged).

We now understand why the Torah presents the various forms of Tzara'at in this order – for we must first develop righteous individuals and a holy society if we are to have any hope of creating and maintaining the nation which carries God's Name and enshrines Him in their midst.

Lifeline: Torah Portion: Tazria and Metzorah

by Rabbi Mordechai Dixler, Program Director, Project Genesis
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This week's Torah portion describes a person infected with a Negah – a blemish, which might infect his skin, his clothing, or even the walls of his house. So it is immediately obvious that the "infection" the Torah is describing was a spiritual illness, not medical. A medical condition would not appear on both humans and walls, and would be treated by a medical doctor. The diagnosis of a Negah, on the other hand, was given by a Kohein, a member of the priestly class specially trained to recognize these blemishes.

What was the point of having a spiritual kind of leprosy? In G-d's relationship with the Jewish people, how was it appropriate for them to be afflicted in this way?

The Talmud (Arachin 16a) attributes these blemishes to any one of seven causes: negative speech, murder, a false oath, forbidden sexual relations, arrogance, theft, and stinginess. G-d used these blemishes to communicate His objection to these negative activities, both to the infected individual and to those who observed his condition.

This disease did not affect everyone who committed these iniquities, and in our time this form of communication does not occur at all. The Negah is a powerful tool for change, and was therefore reserved for people and times of high spiritual caliber. We are simply not on the spiritual level to properly grow and change from having or seeing this illness.

But if the Negah no longer afflicts people, and has not for millennia, it begs the question — why are two portions of the Torah almost entirely devoted to the intricate details of how to recognize and treat a spiritual blemish that no longer exists? How is the Torah speaking to us in our generation, when so many words are devoted to a foreign affliction none of us have ever seen?

While we may not see these blemishes today, these Torah portions make one thing very clear — our actions always have real consequences. Sometimes we see those effects, but other times we don't. We might say something to a neighbor that's insensitive, and wishfully imagine that it didn't really matter. However, just because they didn't react to the comment doesn't mean they didn't hear it and weren't hurt by it. They might forgive us for our insensitivity, or they might not, but the words hurt. In former times our treatment of other people might have been revealed to us and the public through a skin blemish or an ugly stain on our home. In our time the same actions can severely damage our souls, our relationships, and our homes — we just don't always get to see it.

If these are the effects of our negative actions, Judaism teaches us that the consequences of our positive actions and spiritual achievements are many times more potent. By contrast to the Negah, these great spiritual deeds never had a physical manifestation. We do make unfortunate mistakes, but we can always replace them with positive actions to mend our relationships and correct our ways. The effects of our kind words and deeds is not always obvious, but G-d knows and He is keeping score. He is sure to reward us generously.