BS"D
May 2, 2025
Friday is the 19th day of the Omer. Count the next day for Shabbat.

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 12 #28, May 2-3, 2025; 5 Iyar 5785; Tazria-Metzora 5785
Retrospective on Yom Ha'Zikaron/Yom Ha'atzmaut 5725 (April 30-May 1)
Note: Yom Ha'atzmaut, 5 Iyar, moved forward to avoid celebrations running into Shabbat

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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

"My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully." – beginning of meditation at the end of the Amidah prayer.

Tazria and Metzora bring us almost to the very middle of the Torah. (The middle is in Acharei Mot, which we read next week.) In the weeks after Shemini, when Nadav and Avihu die because they bring and burn a "strange fire" by the Mishkan, the Torah presents the conditions that make a person tamei (ritually impure) or tahor (ritually pure). Only a Jew who is tahor may approach Hashem's presence, which resides above the Ark in the Mishkan. Because of the danger of approaching Hashem's presence, the Torah presents the rules of ritual purity and impurity in great detail.

Tazria and Metzora discuss tzaraat – afflictions on a person's skin (or clothes or walls of a home), causes of these impurities, and their cures. While a common English translation of tzaraat is "leprosy," the English term is very misleading. According to the Internet, leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is a chronic bacterial infection caused by Mycobacterium leprae that primarily affect the skin, peripheral nerves, upper respiratory tract, and eyes. Tzaraat is not a disease, not bacterial, and does not spread through direct contact with another person who has the disease. Tzaraat, instead, is a sign that a person suffers from a spiritual disorder, must consult with a Kohen (not a physician), isolate, figure out his or her spiritual lackings, and perform teshuvah. While the classic cause of tzaraat is "lashon horah," or evil speech (such as slander), hautiness is also an also important spiritual lacking associated with tzaraat. A person with tzaraat is called a "metzora." Tzaraat may also afflict a person's clothes or the walls of his home. Stinginess is a classic cause of tzaraat on the walls of a person's home.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine explains that tzaraat is a gift from Hashem, a sign that a person has some significant spiritual shortcoming and must perform teshuvah. Hashem's gift is alerting a person to his spiritual shortcoming so he can reflect, understand his social shortcomings, and perform teshuvah. Once a metzora performs teshuvah and a Kohen validates his cure, the metzora undergoes a prescribed ritual and returns to society. Hashem's gift is informing the metzora of his spiritual problem and prescribing a path to full recovery. Neither the diagnosis nor the cure involves a physician or any medical intervention.

Rabbi David Fohrman explains that the ritual required for a cured metzora to return to society is very similar to the ritual of Korban Pesach. Both rituals involve two live clean birds, blood, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop. Tzaraat gives the appearance of dead skin on part of a person's body. Recovery from tzaraat is similar to recovering from a partial death or near death situation (as Aharon describes Miriam's appearance when she has tzaraat). The Korban Pesach comes right after B'Nai Yisrael survive the tenth plague – killing of the first born of Egypt. After the Korban Pesach, and after the ritual of a recovered metzora, the Jews involved join or rejoin B'Nai Yisrael. The individual who may have been isolated rejoins his communal part and connects to the Jewish people.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander brings the Haftorah, about metzorim who save the Jews of Israel (northern kinigdom) from starvation, to the present. We encounter many instances in Jewish history when God selects people of uncertain holiness to be His instruments of saving the Jewish people. The Haftorah focuses on Gehazi, Elisha's assistant who embarrassed the prophet by asking Na'aman, the Aramean general, for a tribute after Elisha cured his tzaraat. (Elisha had refused to accept any payment.) God punishes Gehazi by giving him and his three sons tzaraat for the rest of their lives. Gehazi and his sons are outside city walls because of their tzaraat. When they are near death from starvation and thirst, they go into the Aramean camp – and discover that the Arameans have abandoned their camps and left their food, water, and wealth. The metzorim eat, drink, and then go to the city to tell the Jews that it is safe to enter the Aramean camp for food and water. The man who sinned against Elisha saves the Jews from the Aramean siege. We find similar incidents in Jewish history. For example, Cyrus, a pagan ruler, sends Jews back from Persia to Jerusalem to help rebuild the second temple. Five hundred years later, Herod, a particularly sinful Roman, initiates a huge project to transform the poorly built second Temple into a magnificent structure.

Rabbi Brander observes that the early Zionists in Israel are primarily secular Jews. Throughout much of the history of Israel in the past 77 years, the secular Jews have done most of the fighting and absorbed most of the injuries and deaths. In the past 18 months, since October 7, 2023, religious Jews have greatly increased their participation in the fighting and absorbed much greater losses compared to earlier in Israeli history. (The percentage of Haredi Jews involved in the fighting, however, remains much lower than the percentages for other parts of Israeli society.) During the week that includes Yom HaZickron and Yom Ha'atzmaut, Rabbi Brander reminds us that we must appreciate the contributions from all parts of the Israeli society.

Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah and 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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Haftarat Parshat Tazria-Metzora: Lessons for the Modern State of Israel

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * 5785 / 2025
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the return of our hostages still in Gaza, for the refuah shlayma of our wounded in body or spirit, and for the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

It is inconceivable and absurd that God should bring on redemption by means of those who deny and hate Him. Hence, Zionists and the State of Israel are in effect obstacles to the true redemption. This view, formulated by Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum in his magnum opus, Vayoel Moshe, is a fundamental tenet of the worldview of the Neturei Karta. Rabbi Teitelbaum's rejection of the possibility of non-religious actors playing a role in redemption stands in direct contradiction with this week's Haftarah.

Fittingly, with Shabbat marking the 5th of Iyyar, the official date of Yom Haatzmaut, this week's Haftarah offers a response to R. Teitelbaum, suggesting that anyone can be the agent of divine providence. After reading in the Torah about the rules governing tzara'at, we recount the story of four lepers who were exiled from the community after Gehazi, assistant to the prophet Elisha, abused his relationship with him.

When Elisha declined payment for healing Na'aman, the Aramean general, with leprosy, Gehazi pursued him, deceitfully requesting funds in Elisha's name. Due to his family's greed and having embarrassed the prophet, Gehazi's family was banished from the community of Israel. Gehazi, who betrays the prophet for greed, is punished with the same ailment that Na'aman was cured from: leprosy for himself and his three sons.

At the time, the Aramean army had laid siege to the cities of Israel, causing great famine amongst the people. With Gehazi and his family living outside the protective walls of the city and certain death looming, they decided to venture down to the encampment of the Aramean army, hoping to surrender and find something to eat.

To their surprise, the camp had been abandoned. Instead of simply taking food and their fill of gold, they decided to inform the Israelite king, Yehoram. Despite fearing that it might be a trap, Yehoram proceeded to the Aramean encampment and – thanks to this act, the Jews of Samaria were saved.

From the Torah's narrative, emphasized by the Talmud)Sotah 47a(, Gehazi and his family are both physical and spiritual lepers. They have perpetrated the great sin of publicly disgracing God and His prophet.

And yet, it is these very lepers who inform the king, thereby facilitating the salvation of the Jewish people. This shows that God does not wait for the most worthy candidates, but instead, even someone as deeply flawed as Gehazi – one of the the few figures in Tanach denied a portion in the world to come for his misdeeds)Mishna Sanhedrin 10:2(– can be chosen to be the agent of redemption.

Gehazi and his leprous sons are not meant to be equated with the early secular Zionists, whose fundamental aim was to ensure the safety of the Jewish people. Yet the story highlights the theological position articulated by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Rabbi Norman Lamm: that God is not limited in who He uses to bring about redemption.

Rav Kook wrote at great length of the role God assigned to the secular Zionists in the redemption process of the Jewish people. People of all backgrounds and levels of religious observance played a role in the birth of the State of Israel – and continue to do so today, contributing to the country's defense, growth and success.

That God chose primarily non-religious Jews to establish the state may strike us as puzzling, but it should not lead us to doubt the blessing that Israel represents. In fact, in the eighteenth century, Rav Chaim ben Attar commented that righteousness is not a prerequisite for the Jewish people's redemption. Thank God we have never reached the point that we were bereft of righteous people – and indeed, the State of Israel is the greatest supporter of Torah study in the world.

Since October 7th, we have witnessed an outpouring of heroism from soldiers, civilians and volunteers of all stripes – many of whom may not define themselves as religious – but whose actions have unmistakably advanced the cause of Jewish sanctity and survival.
These include our reservists and their families, medical professionals healing wounds of both body and soul, and the thousands of volunteers still supporting the war effort, even after months of exhaustion and grief. Their level of formal religious observance – or if they are even Jewish – does not define their capacity to redeem or protect the Jewish people or to serve as agents of God.

As we stand between Yom Hazikaron and Yom Haatzmaut, we are reminded that redemption is forged not only in the batei midrash, but also in the trenches of war, in hospitals and in homes. Every act of courage, every life sacrificed in service, sanctifies God's name and brings us closer to the fulfillment of God's promise.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. **Ohr Torah Stone is in the midst of its spring fund-raising drive. Please support this effort with Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

Israel's religious community has shouldered a disproportionate burden in the past 18 months of war: A rabbi weighs in on what that portends

By Judah Ari Gross (April 30, 2025) *

]This posting is in two parts – introduction is here; full piece, including the interview with Rabbi Brander, is included as an attachment to the email edition and at the Internet entry posted at the end of this summary.[

The massacres in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, were overwhelmingly an attack on kibbutzim, particularly secular ones. But the burden of the war that resulted from those attacks has disproportionately been shouldered by Israel's "national religious" community, in terms of both the number of casualties and the amount of reserve service that its members have performed over the past 18 months.

It can be seen anecdotally in the memorials at flagship religious Zionist schools and yeshivot, and it can be seen quantitatively in a study published late last year by the Israel Democracy Institute.

In the study, a bar graph shows reserve service over time by religious affiliation, with secular and "traditional" Israelis serving at roughly the same level as their portion of the population, while those who identify as religious are serving at nearly twice that rate, with religious soldiers making up 27.4% of combat reservists, while religious Israelis make up 14.7% of the population. The graph also shows that Haredim who make up 14.5% of the population, made up 2.1% of reservists in 2024. The study also found that, unlike secular Israelis whose share of reserve duty has decreased over the course of the war, the share of religious reservists has been going up. This represents a major challenge not only for the reservists themselves, who often serve at the cost of their careers and salaries, but — for those who have families — also for their spouses and children, who are forced to contend logistically and emotionally with their prolonged absences.

A result of this has been that a disproportionate amount of the casualties in the past 18 months of war have also been religious.

This was not always the case. A study last year by Israeli military scholar Yagil Levy found that the proportion of religious troops killed in war is more than 10% higher in the current war — officially known as the Iron Swords War — than it was in the 2014 Gaza war or the 2006 Second Lebanon War.

The effects of these losses on the religious community and on Israeli society in general will likely be profound. As Israel continues to debate the issue of military enlistment for Haredim, some of the harshest voices are coming from the religious Zionist community, who can credibly argue that they are bearing the burden of Haredi exemptions.

To better understand the effects of the past 18 months of war on Israel's national religious community, eJewishPhilanthropy spoke with Rabbi Kenneth Brander, the president and rosh yeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a moderate religious Zionist network of schools and religious institutions.

* **https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/israels-religious-community-has-shouldered-a-disproportionate-burden-in-the-past-18-months-of-war-a-rabbi-weighs-in-on-what-that-portends/** I have copied and presented the introduction. **Follow the link above for the interview with Rabbi Brander.** Judah Ari Gross is managing editor at eJewishPhilanthropy. Prior to joining eJP, Judah was a correspondent for the Times of Israel, reporting first on the military and then on Israel-Diaspora affairs and religion.

Tazria: Bringing the Baby to the Bris

By Rabbi Dovid Green © 5757

In this week's parsha we find the commandment to perform Bris Milah, or circumcision on the eighth day of a baby boy's life. Those familiar with the practice know that it is done with great fanfare, with everyone wishing the parents mazal tov and blessings for the child's future. Participants join in a festive meal. It is thought of as the time when the Jewish child is making his first step toward joining the ranks of his brethren. However, for the baby it is obviously much less pleasant physically than it is for all of the other participants. As a matter of fact, in today's world, it's common to hear criticism of the practice as if it is a cruel, barbaric thing to do to an unsuspecting, vulnerable infant.

There is a midrash which relates an exchange between a Roman the midrash calls Turnusrufus the Evil, and Rabbi Akiva. Turnusrufus asked Rabbi Akiva whose deeds are greater, those of G-d, or those of people. Rabbi Akiva answered those of people are greater. After some give and take, Turnusrufus got to the point. *"Why do you circumcize yourselves?"* Rabbi Akiva brought Turnusrufus stalks of grain and beautiful cakes to prove to him that the deeds of mankind are greater. Turnusrufus then asked Rabbi Akiva *"if G-d wants you to be circumcized, why aren't you naturally born that way?"* Rabbi Akiva responded *"then why must an infant's umbilical cord be cut after birth? Rather, the reason why people are not born circumcized is because the commandments were give to refine mankind."*

The Maharal of Prague explains this midrash in the following way. Turnusrufus thought that the deeds of mankind are inferior to those of nature being that nature is the work of G-d. That is why he said that circumcision is inferior to leaving the foreskin intact, being that the foreskin is the work of the Creator. Rabbi Akiva responded that the deeds of mankind are greater being that they are the finishing touch brought about through intellect. The proof to that is the difference between a stalk of wheat and a cake. The wheat is lacking until it is refined and the work is completed through the means of the intellect. Turnusrufus further asked why a child is not born circumcized if G-d doesn't want him to have a foreskin. This question is based on the objection that nature is lacking. Mankinds actions do add to G-d's creation, but G-d's deeds are certainly not inferior. Consequently, if G-d wanted people to be circumcized, they could have been circumcized naturally, being that nature is no worse than the intelligently directed actions of mankind. At this point the proof from the cakes would not suffice, because even though the cakes are special, the wheat is no less unique. To this question Rabbi Akiva responds with the proof from a child's umbilical cord needing to be cut, that indeed the work of nature is inferior, and in need of improvement by mankind; nature is not in itself a finished product. As a result it is not a question why a child is born uncircumcized. Nature is not complete without the input of mankind.

Rabbi Akiva points out that the commandments were given to refine mankind. Refining means to raise it up from its natural state. **By performing Bris Milah, circumcision, we transcend nature, to a higher plane. As long as we don't perform circumcision, we are similar to the animal kingdom. However, by giving us the commandment, G-d gave us the opportunity to attain a higher, more refined level of existence.**]emphasis added[

In conclusion, the commandments are given to us with the intention that through them we can achieve our purpose, and bring nature as well to its culmination. May we have the merit to do so.

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5757-tazria/

A Thought on the Parsha (Tazria/Metzora): A Tzara'at Survivor

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015

The double parasha Tazria-Metzorah details the laws of tumah, any impurity that would require people to maintain their distance from the Mishkan. The primary focus is on the metzorah, a person afflicted with the skin disease tzara'at, and how he is to become pure. The parasha continues with cases of tzara'at that occur on garments and on a house before turning the focus back to people and their impurities: the zav, literally the *"flow,"* a man with an unusual penile emission; a man who had a seminal emission; the *niddah,* the woman who has menstruated; and the *zavah,* the woman who has had an irregular flow of blood.

The common denominator of all of these tumaot is that they develop from within the person; they are not contracted from the outside. Whether the condition is a skin disease or some type of flow, the source is in the person. Although less intense than the tumah of touching a corpse, the tumah of these parshiyot is more severe in one important way: it directly defines personal status. Such a person may not enter into to the Levite camp, or, after the wilderness period, the Temple Mount. A person with corpse-impurity, by contrast, can go up onto the Temple Mount.

Tumah that comes from the outside, even if very intense, does not define the identity of the person to whom it transferred. We do not have a proper noun for a person who has touched a corpse; he is described only in terms of what he has done. In contrast, Tazria-Metzorah is filled with a cast of characters – the Metzorah, the Zav, the Niddah, the Zavah – defined by their status. Hence, they must keep their distance from the Temple, where the primary concern is to keep tamei things, and more specifically tamei people, out.

We often define a person's very self by more readily identifiable traits. This can help us organize our reality, but it can also lead to generalization and discrimination. My children have special needs, but these don't define them. I do not want them to go through life as "he is Asperger's" or even "he is autistic." These are conditions they have not adjectives and certainly not proper nouns. I want no one to forget – especially them – that, first and foremost, they are special, unique, wonderful people who are so much more than any particular condition they may have. When people meet one of my sons, they have to see them for who they are; if all they see is a label, they are not really seeing them at all.

As we might expect, a closer reading of this week's parasha reveals that the Torah does not label people by their conditions. Take, for example, the man with an irregular flow. He is referred to as ha-zav. This could be translated as a proper noun: "the Flow-er," or "the Emitter." However, this approach is almost universally eschewed; most translators have understood that the word zav, as it is used here, is not meant as a name but a descriptor. The proper translation is, "the man who has a flow." This is his condition, not who he is.

This is true for everyone in our parasha. There is the man asher teizei mimenu shikhvat zera, *"who has experienced a seminal emission"*; the woman who is bi'nidattah, *"experiencing her flow"*; and the woman who is *"in her [irregular] flow"* (Vayikra, 15:16, 20, 26-28). These are people in certain states, not people defined by their state. Because the tumah

occurs to them directly they own their tumah more, and they are more distanced from the Mikdash, but this does not and should not define their identity.

There is one exception to this rule. Although the person with the skin disease is mostly described just that simply, the Torah does, in one place, give him a proper name. At the beginning of Parashat Metzorah he is called the metzorah, a title used in very much the same sense as *"the leper."* This may be because, unlike the others, this condition is long-lasting, severe, potentially recurrent, and visible to all. It is thus more likely that a person may wind up being defined by it. This is often what happens with those who have cancer. Consider the following blog post:

> *I had migraines for 25 years. Bad ones, that left me quaking in agony in a darkened room, moving only to vomit. Those migraines changed my life more than cancer did… Yet, I don't consider them a part of my identity.*
>
> *Not so with cancer. I have migraines, I am a cancer patient.*

I suppose the [intensity of the] treatment can help explain it… We can't keep it a secret, like those with high blood pressure can. We don't get to face our disease in private: we lose our hair and are thus outed as cancer patients. If we leave the house, we tell the world.

It's also true that the fact that the disease can come back and strike at any time is part of the reason it never fully leaves your psyche.

Notice how many of the characteristics of living with cancer parallel those of tzara'at: intensive treatment, the public nature (hair growing wild in one case, baldness in the other), the potential for recurrence. These traits can conspire to turn the disease into identity.

I believe, however, that even here the Torah pushes back against this sort of labeling. It is ironic that the label metzorah does not appear when the person is diagnosed with the condition, when he is ostracized from the camp, or when he practices the public signs announcing his state. It is only assigned when he begins the process of purification*: "This shall be the law of the metzorah on the day that he becomes pure…"* (Vayikra, 14:2). It seems that the Torah is acknowledging that this state can become an identity and advising that it only be recognized as such in retrospect, once the condition can no longer outwardly identify who they are. In fact, one study has shown that people who self-identify as a "cancer survivor" are more likely to have "better psychological well-being and post-traumatic growth," this in spite of the same study's finding that "neither identifying as a 'patient' nor a 'person with cancer' was related to well-being."

It would seem that after having lived through such a traumatic condition, it is healthier to see one's current state as a significant break from one's past state. If one 'had cancer' and now simply 'does not have cancer,' if there is significant continuity of identity from the period of disease to after, it may be harder to fully own one's new, healthy state. Perhaps the Torah is telling the person with tzara'at, resist letting this terrible disease define you when you have it. But when you are putting it behind you, then you can say that before you were a metzorah, and now you are no longer.

Just as they may be helpful when the condition is a thing of the past, labels for people can serve a useful function in legal texts. Halakha and the rabbinic literature do in fact assign labels to people with these conditions: a woman with a flow, for example, is a niddah, a menstruant. Legal systems may need a convenient way of categorizing and grouping, but when dealing with real people with current conditions, labeling will always remain dangerous, reductionist, and dehumanizing.

While the Torah focuses on how certain people can become tahor, how they can change their current state, we must acknowledge that there are people with lifelong conditions. These people can only talk about managing their condition, not treating it and certainly not curing it. We cannot further trap them in their condition by labeling them and identifying them with it. It is our responsibility as a society to ensure that, whomever the person and whatever their condition, we will always see him or her as he or she fully is, that we see the inherent purity that is each person's essence.

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives

Lashon Hara: Thoughts for Tazria/Metsora

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Years ago, I — along with many others -- regularly received envelopes stuffed with pages put together by a group that claimed to represent "authentic" Judaism. The authors believed themselves to be the sole arbiters of true Judaism, and they vilified those who deviated from their views. Their screeds were drenched in hateful, slanderous language. It seems not to have occurred to them that lashon hara — evil gossip — is a highly serious sin.

Halakha teaches that just as it is forbidden to communicate lashon hara, so it is a transgression to receive it. I sent the authors several requests to remove me from their mailing list but they ignored my requests. I finally came up with a great idea. The next time I received one of their mailings, I took a red magic marker and wrote in large letters on the front of the envelope: **RETURN TO SENDER: OBSCENE MATERIAL.** That solved the problem. I received no more mail from them.

When such people engage in gossip/slander/defamation of character, they are indeed generating obscene material. They somehow delude themselves into thinking that they are permitted to defame people whose views they deem insufficiently religious. Their misguided and self-righteous behavior reflects an incredible arrogance…and sinfulness.

The problem has become far more severe now that people can spread their defamations via electronic means. They reach thousands of readers by posting their venom on websites, or entering malicious material on Wikipedia, or sending emails.

Rambam points out that among the sins for which there is almost no possible atonement is the sin of maligning someone in public. Even if one eventually wishes to repent, he/she will not know who heard the sinful words and therefore cannot ever be sure he/she can reach everyone to retract the wicked statements. Evil words, once made public, are impossible to retract fully. All the more so with *"electronic lashon hara."*

Modern technology makes it quite easy for people to post hostile remarks against those with whom they disagree. These ad hominem attacks gain lives of their own, being forwarded to readers who then forward them to others etc. When people — including those who think of themselves as being religious — spread defamatory material, they undermine the moral fabric of society.

Rabbinic tradition teaches that the disease of Metsora — spiritual leprosy — is brought on by speaking lashon hara. By debasing others, the sinner becomes debased and befouled. Such individuals need to be isolated so that they can come to terms with their personality flaws…and hopefully change their ways for the better.

The daily Amidah prayer has a concluding meditation: *"Oh Lord, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully."* Let everyone pay close attention to these words and strive to live up to them. Lashon hara is obscene material. It must be avoided, it must be rejected, it must be returned to sender for atonement.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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Yom HaAtsmaut: To bless Hallel or not to bless...the larger question: A Blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

[Special posting for Yom HaAtsmaut. Traditional day, Shabbat, May 3 (5 Iyar); observed Thursday, May 1, 2025 (3 Iyar) to avoid celebrations running into Shabbat]

Shortly after his election as Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel in the early 1970s, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef visited New York City and spent Yom haAtsmaut here. He gave a shiur for rabbis, held at Congregation Shearith Israel; and he gave a shiur for students at Yeshiva University. I attended both…and I was distressed.

Both of these shiurim were on the same topic: is it permissible according to halakha to recite Hallel with a blessing on Yom haAtsmaut, Israel's Independence Day? Rabbi Yosef gave a very learned discourse, peppered with numerous references to halakhic sources. He demonstrated the phenomenal range of his halakhic knowledge and his remarkable skill as a public speaker.

His conclusion: it is not permissible to say Hallel with a blessing on Yom haAtsmaut. Moreover, it is preferable not to recite Hallel in the normal place after the Amidah, but rather one may add psalms of Hallel at the end of services. If congregations already had the practice of reciting Hallel with a blessing, they should refrain from reciting the blessing. If they had the practice of chanting Hallel in its usual place (after the Amidah), they need not change…although it would be desirable for them to do so. (For a full discussion of Rabbi Yosef's views on Hallel on Yom haAtsmaut, please see Rabbi Binyamin Lau's book, *Mimaran ad Maran,* pp. 163f.)

So on his auspicious and highly publicized visit to New York, the Chief Rabbi of Israel chose to speak in a way that diminished the religious significance of the Jewish State. With so many other topics of great importance to our diaspora communities, he chose rather to offer a technical shiur on why we should not recite Hallel with a blessing in observance of Israel's Independence Day.

The Chief Rabbi of Israel — instead of highlighting the religious significance of Medinat Yisrael and deepening our love of Israel — diminished its religious significance.

As a young rabbi who viewed the establishment of the Jewish State as a monumental event in Jewish history, I was deeply distressed by Rabbi Yosef's shiurim. His lectures were surely very learned…but — to use an analogy — they focused on the trees and didn't see the forest. It was as though halakha is a self-enclosed system of arguments and counter-arguments, that doesn't open its eyes to see new realities.

How very different was the approach of Rabbi Benzion Meir Hai Uziel, who served as the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel from 1939 until his death in 1953. Rabbi Uziel's student, Rabbi Abraham Shalem, cites the words of his teacher:

> *"This day (Yom haAtsmaut) is a festival day for [the people of] Israel residing in the land and all the places of the dispersion, for our generation and for all generations to come — to praise God's compassion, to announce in a voice of singing, happiness and praise: this is the day that the Lord has made, let us celebrate and rejoice on it."*

Rabbi Shalem, following the teachings of Rabbi Uziel, taught:

> *"it is our great obligation to praise and thank the Rock of Israel and its Redeemer for His miracles and wonders that He performed for us and our children in our holy land. All who belittle and cast aspersions on the might and salvation of the Creator of the universe, Rock and Redeemer of Israel, behold they repudiate His goodness and mercy…It is a mitzvah to read Hallel in public with a blessing on Yom haAtsmaut, the day of the first blossoming of our redemption and freedom of our souls in the land of our ancestors."* (R. Abraham Shalem, *Eshed haNehalim,* vol. 2, p. 20).

Rabbis Uziel, Shalem and Yosef all relied on the same halakhic sources…and yet came to very different conclusions. Perhaps we can see this debate as a difference in religious vision.

For Rabbi Yosef, religious questions and answers essentially are technical halakhic matters. The halakhic system includes a vast number of texts, and the posek is obliged to study the texts, evaluate them, decide which texts are applicable to any given situation. One's eyes are focused on the *"four cubits of halakha"*…which contain all the information we need.

For Rabbis Uziel and Shalem, halakha is not a closed system of texts and authoritative sources. The posek surely must know the texts; but the posek must also open his eyes to the outside realities. The establishment of the State of Israel, after nearly 1900 years of exile for the Jewish People, is a historical and halakhic novum. Given this amazing new reality, we naturally want to pour out our hearts with a meaningful and joyful religious response. Our religious souls want to recite Hallel, with a blessing, in joyful recognition and appreciation of God's providence. Not to recite Hallel with a blessing would seem to be a sign of blatant ingratitude to God.

The question about saying Hallel with a blessing on Yom haAtsmaut has much broader implications. Is halakha a closed system that operates solely within its four cubits? Or is halakha a system of life that responds in a living way to the realities of our lives?
I recite Hallel with a blessing on Yom haAtsmaut. I am grateful to Rabbi Uziel and Rabbi Shalem (my own rabbi when I was a teenager growing up in Seattle) for leading the way, for sharing their vision of Israel, of halakha, and of service to the Almighty.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City. Rabbi Angel is a descendant of Jews of Rhodes. His doctoral dissertation (and first book) was a history of the Jews of Rhodes.

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https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/yom-haatsmaut-bless-hallel-or-not-blessthe-larger-question-blog-rabbi-marc-d-angel

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Tazriya - Metzorah: Touched by Love

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *****

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

The concept of Tzaraas is an amazing one. If a person was straying from healthy social interactions, Hashem would send an alert on his body, clothes, or house, letting him know that something needed to be fixed. When the Jewish people first learned of such afflictions, they panicked as they thought of these afflictions as heavy-handed punishments. Moshe reassured them. The purpose of these afflictions isn't to afflict. These afflictions are meant as alerts; they are meant to facilitate a cure. The goal, as the Medrash describes it, is to get back on track so that *"You will eat, drink, and rejoice."*

The affliction of Tzaraas on a person's body would often come because of Lashon Horah. A person who maligned others was creating barriers between friends, relatives, and even spouses. When Tzaraas came, it forced the person into isolation. The Torah says, *"He shall dwell alone."* Chazal explain, *"Just as he separated between people, so he should be separated."* This was not just a punishment. It was an appropriate reprimand that alerted him that comments that he enjoyed sharing were destroying friends and families. Isolating him for a period gave him an opportunity to think about the pain of being isolated. The affliction was an alert — on some level it was a blessing — intended to get him back on track to healthy communal living.

Tzaraas could also appear on a person's house. This would often indicate that he was being stingy. When this type of Tzaraas would appear, the homeowner would report the problem to the Kohein. Interestingly, the house would not become Tomey until the Kohein came and declared it Tomey. Therefore, the Kohein would not rush over right away. Instead, the Kohein would instruct the homeowner to empty the house of its contents, so that the contents would not become Tomey if the Kohein declared it impure. The person was forced to empty the house of its contents, exposing to the community, and to himself, his many assets. In fact, if in the past he refused to lend an item to a neighbor claiming that he didn't have it, his stinginess would now be exposed, and the truth became clear.

The purpose of Tzaraas on a person's house was not simply retribution and punishment. It was an alert that the person was on a bad path. The person who was stingy and refusing to lend things needed a wake-up call to stop cutting himself off from doing acts of kindness. He was alerted that he was very blessed and should share his blessings with others. He would then (hopefully) reassess his policies and attitudes towards his neighbors and the community.

Interestingly, as legal and rebuke-like the topic of Tzaraas is, there is a powerful touch of tenderness that is part of the conversation. Let us consider what happened when a person approached the Kohein and informed him that there was a Tzaraas-looking affliction on his house. When the Kohein would tell him to empty his house, the man might have asked, *"Why? Even if it is Tzaraas, can't I always purify the contents in a Mikva?"* The Kohein would explain that that was only partly true. *"Yes, many things could be purified, but some things, like earthenware utensils, cannot be purified. They would have to be discarded."* Then the Kohein would add with sensitivity, *"We are not looking to cause you more loss than required. I will wait until you remove those utensils."*

I consider that little gesture to be monumental, possibly a turning point and cure in the life of this homeowner. You see, many people who are stingy aren't that way because they are bad people or were born with a stingy disposition. Many people are stingy because they feel they need to be in order to survive. They feel that the world would take advantage of them if they didn't stand up and protect their possessions.

It is possible that earlier in life they were indeed taken advantage of or even bullied. But the affliction of Tzaraas comes to them as a wake-up call and as a blessing. *"Enough!"* it says. *"Maybe once upon a time you struggled, but now you are well off. It is time to switch modes and become a giver."*

As Tzaraas appeared on his home, the homeowner knew that he was at a life altering moment. He will have to move out of his home. If it was declared Tzaraas he might have to knock down his home. (Keep in mind that there is no such thing as Tzaraas-home-owner's insurance.) At this potentially life-altering moment, the Kohein's sensitivity could make all the difference in helping the homeowner change his attitude to life and his relationship with other people. The Kohein said, *"Take the utensils out, I care about you and your possessions. We will do what is required by Halacha. But let us do what we can by having you first empty the house, to avoid an unnecessary loss of having the utensils become Tomey."*

When the homeowner heard this, it is probable that he was hearing a touch of sensitivity and consideration that he hadn't heard in many years. Like so many who exhibit self-centered behavior simply because they are hurting, but blossom with goodness when they are touched with love, this homeowner could well become a changed person from this experience.

Tzaraas could be seen as a punishment. Moshe instructed the Jewish people to view it as an alert. It is also possible to see the Tzaraas story as the start of a cure, where a homeowner finally experiences a touch of love and consideration and will now be able to pass that love on through a newfound awareness and capacity to do kindness.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbas.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Parshas Tazria Metzorah – The Honorable Sinner

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * (5781)

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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Tazria Metzora: Curing Narrow Mindedness

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * (5783)

]note: "leper" and "Leprosy" in this Dvar Torah are generic terms for physical manifestations for a spiritual disease and are not related to the medical condition later called leprosy.[

> *When the leper heals, he brings two live birds, cedar, crimson wool, and hyssop. The priest will slaughter one bird onto a clay vessel filled with fresh water. He will then dip the live bird, with the cedar, crimson wool, and hyssop, in the mixture of blood and water. He will sprinkle it on the healing leper seven times, and will then let the live bird fly into the fields.*)Free translation of Lev. 14:2-7(

This strange ritual is usually understood as a symbolic act of atonement for the sin of gossip and calumny, which in turn is understood as the spiritual sin of the leper. The blood stains the water, just as the leper contaminated his environment, and setting the bird free symbolizes the far-reaching damage of the rumors spread by the leper. This explanation presents the healing process of the leper as incomplete, as its symbolism still carries an accusatory tone.

In addition, though the traditional view of leprosy as a punishment for calumny is supported by several verses, and seems to be the reason for the leprosy contracted by Moshe and Miriam, other cases mentioned in the bible do not fall under this category.

I would like to offer a broader definition to the spiritual sin punished by leprosy, based on the concept of the bi-radical root. This is the theory that in biblical Hebrew we can identify two-letter roots which later branch out to three-letter ones. All the new roots created are nuances of the original one. i The word צרעת – leprosy, is derived from the root צרע, which has in its basis the bi-radical root צר – narrow. That root is also in the basis of the biblical roots צרב, צרה, צרח, צרפ, צרר, which all share the concept of being limited or restricted. צרב means burning the skin, limiting its growth; to be in צרה is to be in a narrow place, in distress; צרח means a sharp, piercing scream, as well as a high and narrow tower; צרפ is the action of

separating slags from metal, most commonly used in the bible as a metaphor for suffering; צרר is a bundle, which contains objects in an enclosure, and it also means adversaries, in the sense of those who besiege.

We can conclude, then, that the sin of the leper is a narrow and limited world view, which prevents him from unlocking potential talents and which leads him to misjudge others.This definition explains the six known cases of leprosy in the bible, and includes the sins of gossip, arrogance and greed:

Moshe)Exodus 4:1-7(: Moshe refuses to believe that the Israelites will be open to his offer of redemption. Despite God's promise, he chooses to limit his vision. He is punished with momentary leprosy.

Miriam)Numbers 12:1-16(: Miriam speaks against Moshe. She complains that she is as great a prophet as he is. Seeking the glory and greatness of others is a sign that one chooses to mimic them instead of searching for his own talents. Because of Miriam's own greatness, her leprosy lasts only seven days, as if to show that her words were said at a moment of weakness.

Uzziyahu)II Chronicles 26(: Uzziyahu was one of the most successful kings of the southern kingdom of Yehudah, a conqueror, a builder, and a unifier, but at a certain point he wanted to serve as the High Priest. The priests tried to prevent him, but he forced his way to the inner sanctuary with frankincense, only to emerge with leprosy in his forehead, where the High Priests carries the band with God's name on it. Uzziyahu's sin was similar to that of Miriam in that he felt that he needs to mimic other and perform the duties of the High Priest in order to display his greatness. In reality, he did not need that because he had so many other qualities. Probably because the king's transgression involved a physical conflict and a breach of the Temple's boundaries, he remained a leper for life.

Naaman)II Kings 5:1-19(: We are not told what was the cause for Naaman's leprosy, but we do know that Naaman, who was an Aramean general, came to see Elisha after a long correspondence and an elaborate journey, in hope of being cured of his disease. Elisha ordered the general to bathe seven times in the Jordan river, to which he responded with anger: "I thought that he will raise his hand and cure me; did I travel all that distance to be told to bathe in this small river? My rivers back home in Damascus, Amana and Parpar, are better than all the waters of Israel! I can bathe in them and heal!" Naaman, who made the journey from Aram to Israel with the belief that the prophet could cure him, was willing to turn around and return home without heeding the prophet's advice, because it did not make sense to him. That is the epitome of narrow-mindedness. Luckily for him, his servants proved to be more open-minded, and they convinced him to bathe in the Jordan, arguing that he has nothing to lose, and he was indeed cured.

Gehazi)II Kings 5:20-27(: The grateful Naaman returns to Elisha and offers a generous reward, but the prophet declines to accept it and is satisfied with Naaman's recognition of God's power. Elisha's servant Gehazi, who refuses to accept his master's decision, chases the general's chariot and tells him that his master changed his mind because he has just received poor visitors. When Gehazi returns home with his loot, Elisha tells him that Naaman's leprosy will now afflict him. Gehazi's actions stemmed from the narrow vision of one who thinks that material wealth is the solution to all his problems. He has become similar to the leper Naaman, in refusing to accept his master's decision and thinking that he can deceive him.

Four anonymous lepers)II Kings 7:3-9(: The lepers were sitting outside the gates of the besieged city of Shomron. When they found out that the enemy's army was driven away miraculously, they moved from tent to tent, carrying loot and burying it in hiding places, eating and drinking. It was only after they have been doing it for a while that they remembered the plight of their brethren, who were suffering extreme hunger inside the city. Their initial actions show their narrow focus on themselves and on material needs.

In conclusion, we could say that the bible warns us of the dangers of not opening our mind and our heart to the possibilities surrounding us, and of trying to mimic others. This understanding sheds light on the strange ritual of the leper's purification. Slaughtering the first bird over the water symbolizes the killing of innovation and creativity. The cedar and hyssop, the mightiest and lowliest plants, represent the wide range of possibilities, and the crimson stuff stands for

human craftsmanship, which uses simple raw materials to create new and magnificent objects. The second bird is set free to send the message that instead of limiting ourselves, we should spread our wings and explore new fields.

]Editor's Observation: ***Rabbi David Fohrman*** *and his fellow scholars at* ***Alephbeta.org,*** *observe that the purification ritual for a metzora is very similar to the ritual of the Korban Pesach. Afte recovering from tzaraat)a social disease(, a metzora must rejoin society. The Korban Pesach marked the instance when B'Nai Yisrael recovered from slavery in Egypt and joined the Jewish people. Rabbi Fohrman observes that the purification rituals are very similar, because both situations required joining a close social group.[*

ENDNOTE:

i. The first to present this theory in modern times was Dr. Aaron Marcus in his book *Barzilay*. One of the best examples is the root פר which represents strength, possession, and spreading out, and its many derivatives in the bible: פרא, פרד, פרה, פרז, פרח, פרי, פרמ, פרס, פרע, פרצ, פרק, פרש

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** **https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Why We Have Only One Mouth

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

We have two eyes, two ear, two hands, two feet, two lungs, two brain hemispheres but only one mouth.

Our Sages creatively explained this as a Divine phenomenon meant to teach us the importance of proper speech. **The same mouth that speaks wisdom and words of connection should not also be used for dirty speech like slander and baseless hatred.**]emphasis added[

In fact, our portion says that Loshon Hora)gossip(causes tzoraat, a disease which causes the bearer to be exiled from the community for a week. We know all too well how a single statement can make or break a person, marriage, community or country.

If words have such power to destroy, they can also build. To quote V from the movie "V For Vendetta," *"Words are the means to meaning and for those who will listen, the enunciation of truth."* Truth builds. The more truth we say, the more beauty comes into the world.

As we celebrate Israel this week, let us commit to celebrating the truth of its existence and struggle. No matter what lies we hear all around us, we must continue to use our one mouth to speak the truth.

May our words build our Auckland community and also our beloved State of Israel.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation

Knesset Israel)Birmingham, AL(. I reprinted part 1 last week for Mishpatim.

Rav Kook Torah
Israel Independence Day: Who Are You, Great Mountain?

An Assembly in Jerusalem

In the summer of 1923, the Jewish community held a festive service in the Rabbi Yehudah Hasid synagogue in Jerusalem's Old City. The country was then under the rule of the British Mandate, and community leaders organized an assembly of prayers and thanks to the British government in honor of King George V's birthday.

The general atmosphere in the country was, however, one of disappointment and even bitterness. The 1917 Balfour Declaration and the 1920 San Remo Conference had promised to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine, but the policy of the British Mandate in practice was a different story. In an attempt to appease the Arabs, the British White Paper of 1922 placed severe limits on Jewish immigration. Britain furthermore split Mandatory Palestine into two, excluding all lands east of the Jordan River from Jewish settlement.

Rav Kook was one of the speakers at the 1923 assembly. In order to raise the spirits of the Jews of Eretz Yisrael — and also remind the British government of its promises to the Jewish people — he quoted from the week's Haftarah reading. He spoke about the prophecy of Zechariah, who lived at the time of a previous return to Zion, when the Jewish people returned from the Babylonian exile 2,500 years earlier.

Zechariah's Words of Encouragement

There are many parallels between that era and our own time. The Jews returning from Babylonia were disillusioned and downhearted, and the foreign peoples whom the Babylonians had settled in the land created many difficulties. Zechariah sought to reassure the discouraged Jewish settlers.

"Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubavel, you will be a flat plain!")Zechariah 4:7(

To what 'great mountain' was the prophet speaking?

The path leading toward the fulfillment of God's promise to His people, the return to Zion, was endorsed by the mighty empire of those days — Persia. Cyrus, the king of Persia, had officially appointed Zerubavel to oversee the rebuilding of the Jewish community in the land of Israel. Zerubavel, a direct descendant of King Jehoiachin, the penultimate king of Judah, led the first band of Jews back to Jerusalem.

There were, however, many obstacles on the way. The prophet poetically refers to these hurdles as *'great mountains,'* blocking the path and obstructing the return to Zion. Yet, before the king's representative, Zerubavel, these difficulties are nothing; he will flatten them like a level plain.

The Mission of the King's Representative

We live in similar times, Rav Kook concluded. God is fulfilling His promise to restore the Jewish people to their land — this time, through the mighty empire of Great Britain. It is our expectation that, in accordance with the declaration of His Majesty's government, the king's representative — the British High Commissioner — will expedite the return of Israel to the Holy Land, despite the difficulties obstructing this historic process.

"Who are you, great mountain?" Regardless of the complexity of the problems, despite the desire of other peoples to hinder and obstruct, before the power of the tool of Divine Providence, all of these obstacles will be smoothed over and

the path to redemption will be like ‘a level plain.’

)Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 185-187. Adapted from *Mo'adei HaRe’iyah*, p. 403.(

https://ravkooktorah.org/YOM_ATZ60.htm

Lessons in Leadership: How to Praise (Tazria - Metzora 5774. 5781)

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

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 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.*
>
> Avot 2:11

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.**]emphasis added[

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[

W. H. Auden

FOOTNOTES:

]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(.

Discussion Questions for Tazria - Metzora:

1. What is the problem with praising a person's innate abilities?

2. How could Rabban Yochanan have used praise to encourage a growth mindset in his students?

3. Does targeted praise and encouragement of your efforts motivate you?

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tazria/how-to-praise/ 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.

The Subtle Signals of the Tzaraat: An Essay on Parshat Tazria

By Adin Even-Israel)Steinsaltz(, z"l © Chabad 2025

A sign and a wonder

As it sometimes happens, this parshah is called Parshat Tazria even though practically all of it deals with matters relating to the metzora, while Parshat Metzora itself deals with those matters to a much lesser extent.

Maimonides writes that we do not actually know what tzaraat, as it is described in the Torah, is.1 In modern Hebrew, the word tzaraat refers to leprosy, which may be what the Talmud calls *"baalei raatan."*2 To this end, Maimonides writes that,

according to his medical understanding, tzaraat does not resemble any known disease.3

Since this is not a medical matter, it becomes easier to understand the strangest part of this phenomenon – tzaraat on houses and garments. When it appears on human flesh, it is at least possible to think of tzaraat as a disease, but this is certainly not the case when it appears on inanimate objects. Moreover, houses and garments stricken with tzaraat are burned, a much harsher treatment than people who are similarly afflicted receive.

Another puzzle regarding tzaraat is the nature of its tumah, especially in comparison with other types of tumah. Generally, only living things that stopped living, either entirely or partially, can produce tumah. Indeed, among plants and inanimate objects, nothing is intrinsically tamei. Garments or other objects are generally only rendered tamei, but are not intrinsically so. In the laws of tzaraat, however, there exists an anomaly: A garment or house is itself an av hatumah)primary source of impurity(, a phenomenon that is unique to tzaraat.

Maimonides' conclusion is that tzaraat is really not a disease. He says that tzaraat should be regarded not as an illness that is designated as tamei, but as *"a sign and a wonder"* that G d uses to mark someone.

A discriminating affliction

As we mentioned in the previous essay, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi writes that tzaraat is an affliction that strikes only the most exalted individuals.4 He cites the Zohar's statement that there are four spiritual levels that a person can reach, in ascending order: enosh, gever, ish, and – highest of all – adam5 Similarly, the talmudic statement *that "only you are called 'adam'"*6 is based on the assumption that adam is the noblest possible term for a human being. In light of this, it is curious that the term adam is used in connection with the mark of tzaraat: "If a man)adam(has on the skin";7 "If a tzaraat mark appears on a man)adam(."8 The answer is that an ordinary person is not worthy of tzaraat. G d does not bother to put a special mark on a person of no importance to show that he has acted improperly; that would be obvious even without the tzaraat. If a person is known to have serious faults and shortcomings, G d does not need to let people know that he has sinned, nor does the person himself need a warning from heaven; he knows this on his own.

Only someone who is on a high spiritual level is eligible for and in need of such a sign. The Talmud says that the tzaraat marks are an *"altar of atonement."*9 Hence, to receive such a mark is truly indicative of a high level, of which the receiver must be worthy. In this connection, our sages note that in principle, the nations of the world should never be afflicted with boils. In practice, though, non-Jews nevertheless do experience this malady, so that they should not be able to claim that the Jews are *"a nation of people afflicted with boils."*10

Clearly, not everyone who speaks slander gets tzaraat; for if that were the case, it would be very hard to find people who are tahor. The list of people in Tanach who experienced tzaraat is quite impressive, ranging from Moses and Miriam to Naaman, Gechazi, and Uzziyahu. When Miriam speaks slander, she gets tzaraat, and when Moses slanders Israel, he, too, perhaps deserves tzaraat. Naaman *"was important to his master and held in high esteem, for through him G d had granted victory to Aram. He was a mighty man of valor, but a metzora."*11 Uzziyahu was a great king *"who did what was right in G d's sight,"* and *"G d made him prosper."*12 Gechazi not only attended Elisha but was a great man in his own right.13

Spread of the mark

Since tzaraat is not a disease but a mark and a sign, clearly there is something to learn from it. So let us focus on a few of the detailed laws connected with tzaraat.

The first point to consider is this: At what moment does an ordinary blemish become a tzaraat mark, which renders a person tamei? *The surest sign that a blemish is considered tzaraat is that the mark continues to spread.* If it stops immediately after it appears, it remains pure. This is true of all types of tzaraat described in the Torah. When a mark appears, this signals that perhaps there is something in the person's life that must be rectified. But it becomes tzaraat only when it begins to grow.

In the Tochechah section in Leviticus, in which G d reproves the nation, we read: *"If you remain indifferent with Me, I will be indifferent to you with a vengeance."*14 Analogously, the preceding section states, *"If your brother becomes impoverished and sells some of his hereditary land,"*15 followed by*, "If your brother becomes impoverished and loses the ability to support himself beside you,"*16 until finally, *"If your brother becomes impoverished and is sold to you."*17

The Talmud says that these verses in chapter 25 recount one story that unfolds progressively: A person can act improperly without realizing this, in which case G d then causes him to suffer a minor blow. If he still does not realize that he is in the wrong, G d brings upon him another blow. And if he still does not realize this, G d brings upon him yet another blow.18

The same is true of tzaraat and its causes: So long as a person does not stop acting improperly, the tzaraat continues to spread. This applies to many different areas. Every person sins at some point in his life, for *"there is no one so perfectly righteous on earth who does]only[good and never sins."*19 But when this happens, the sinner must recognize his error and stop himself from sinning further. If, however, he allows the stain to grow, it will become malignant tzaraat, which must be burned, destroyed, and eradicated.

"Let her not be like one dead"

Another central element in the laws of tzaraat is that the mark contains dead flesh. The blood – the life – drains out, and therefore the flesh and the hair upon it turn white. When we say that *"the wicked in their lifetime are called dead,"*20 this refers to tumah. A wicked person's tumah derives from the fact that he is essentially a dead creature. The element of death in the tumah of tzaraat shows that a person can die before coming to the end of his physical life; he can continue walking among us and nevertheless be a corpse. Like a corpse, a metzora conveys tumah by being together with someone or something under the same roof. The implication is that the metzora has already begun to die, and therefore even now renders everything that is under the same roof with him tamei. He may appear to be alive and kicking, but in truth he is a walking, breathing corpse.

It happens to people – both young and old – that they take upon themselves the fear of G d, whether in a dramatic change or in a gradual process of spiritual growth. Such a person experiences a spiritual awakening and becomes like a new being. But this same person who was so inspired can sometimes begin to feel that he is partially dead. There is a *respiratory disease called pulmonary fibrosis in which the lungs stiffen, becoming hard like wood.* Even people who do not suffer from physical ailments can sometimes feel like a block of wood. A person who used to smile stops smiling; a person who used to be sensitive in so many ways suddenly turns cold.

Why does this happen? Justifications can always be found. A person may choose to be wary, thinking that to act otherwise would lead to sin or frivolity. One who continues along this path finds that each day another part within him dies. A person who was creative, or who was always joyful, bringing joy to others, now has become a sort of crushed creature, sulking in a corner. He dwells in isolation, outside the camp; it is a sign that something has gone wrong. In the past, he had experienced beauty, and it filled him with feeling; now, he feels nothing.

Such a person, who is dying little by little, continually reinforces this downward spiral by telling himself that the more dead he becomes, the more he deserves such a fate. He thinks that his dark, morose attitude to life is a form of devoutness, as we read in Malachi, *"We have walked mournfully because of God."*21

There is a concept in the Talmud that can often be difficult to comprehend: the notion of *"movable realty."*22 Slaves, for instance, are considered *"movable realty"* – they are human beings who possess the same legal status as one's land or one's house. In Parashat Tazria, we see something very similar – a dead man who continues to move around as if he is alive. The metzora is dead, and therefore conveys the same tuma that a corpse conveys. The only difference is that the *metzora has not been buried yet. He is "movable realty."* Holiness and all that stems from it are characterized by energy and vitality, while tzaraat is a form of death mark, sapping the very life force from the metzora who bears it.

“The healthy skin is a sign of impurity”

Another law of tzaraat is very strange even in the context of other forms of tuma: *“On the day that healthy skin appears on it, he becomes impure. When the Priest sees the healthy skin, he shall declare him impure. The healthy skin is a sign of impurity; it is tzaraat”23* – and the same law applies in all other types of tzaraat.24 **Normally, healthy flesh would seem to be a sign of recovery. But the Torah says the precise opposite: Healthy flesh is a sign of tumah, and he is sent back outside the camp.**]emphasis added[

The meaning of this law is that **if vitality begins to emerge from the tzaraat itself, if the life that a person experiences flows from the mark, this, too, is a sign of tumah. Before, the tzaraat was merely a blemish; now, he is vitalized by it.** This resembles a common sequence of events in a person’s spiritual journey. At first, one simply cannot tolerate people who are unscrupulous regarding certain laws. He may react scornfully to people who neglect to perform the ritual washing of the hands, or who are careless when they trim their fingernails. As a result, he doesn’t want to be around them, so he removes himself from society. After a while, this scorn for others becomes a source of vitality and pleasure for him. Before, he may have slandered others simply because he was haughty, whereas now all of his vitality comes from this vice. When one’s fault becomes a flag and a banner, this is a much more serious problem. At first he viewed this character trait as a vice; now that he indulges in it enthusiastically, it is like putting a stamp of spiritual approval on an evil attribute. While beforehand he engaged in slander occasionally, now it is his whole life.]emphasis added[

“The healthy skin is a sign of impurity.” When healthy flesh begins to grow within the mark, when the affliction itself starts to become his life, this is not the vitality of recovery; it is vitality in which the affliction becomes a remedy, in which death becomes life.

Seeing one’s own faults

An examination of the vices that, according to our sages, cause tzaraat yields a long list: haughtiness, arrogance, miserliness, lashon hara)spreading an evil report(, and many others.25 **Their common denominator is that they are all subtle evils.** Regarding such subtleties it is appropriate that some kind of sign should be given from above, marking the sinner and indicating that the sin requires rectification.]emphasis added[

Why is it so difficult to perceive these faults on one’s own? Why does G d have to mark them? It seems that these are all faults for which it is very easy to find some kind of justification, and that is why it is so difficult to identify them and rid oneself of them. When someone commits a blatant sin with full knowledge that what he is doing is wrong, he may experience pangs of guilt that prevent him from repeating such a sin. But what happens to someone who commits a sin and feels that it is a mitzvah?

This is precisely the case of Miriam. Miriam wanted to give a reproof, feeling that her words should and must be said. Hence, if she had not been stricken with tzaraat, she would not have understood that she was out of line. The same is true of the other vices on the list. Haughtiness is often confused with pride, but they are actually quite different. Haughtiness pertains only to people of great stature, whereas pride can apply to anyone. A person can be covered in filth and be despised by all who meet him, and still think of himself as the greatest person in the world – this is the sin of pride. In the case of haughtiness, however, we are talking about someone who has ample reason to believe that he is on a high level, that he is a true tzaddik, but this perspective makes it impossible for him to see his own faults. Uzziyahu was a great king who was victorious in wars, built up the country, and was surrounded with honor and glory; he certainly had reason to believe that he was growing ever greater. The same was true of Naaman, *“a mighty man of valor, but a metzora,”*26 who was the most important man in the kingdom.

The Mishnah says, *“A person may examine all tzaraat marks except his own.”*27 What is the reason for this? After all, one may examine his own slaughtering knife; to be sure, a rabbi usually performs this examination, but this is only out of respect, or because a rabbi is generally more familiar with the relevant halachot. One can also render halachic decisions for oneself regarding the laws of kashrut if one has the requisite knowledge. In the case of tzaraat, however – where one would think that a certain measure of expertise would suffice – one may not examine the marks for oneself.

An additional oddity in the laws of tzaraat is the following: The Torah decrees that one must show the marks to a Priest, who must be the one to declare if the mark is tamei. But how does the Priest know? After all, not all Priests are Torah scholars! If, indeed, the Priest is unfamiliar with the laws of tzaraat, a Torah scholar stands at the Priest's side and instructs him to say "tamei" or "tahor" when appropriate.28 Thus, in a situation where the metzora is himself a Torah scholar, the following interaction is plausible: The metzora shows his tzaraat to the Priest; the Priest looks at the mark and asks the
metzora, *"Rabbi, what is the law in such a case?"*; the metzora responds, "In my opinion, the mark is tamei"; and on that basis the Priest declares, "The mark is tamei," or, "The mark is tahor," rendering the person tamei or tahor respectively. According to halachah, this is a perfectly legitimate arrangement. Why, then, can't a person examine his own tzaraat?

The rule that *"a person may examine all tzaraat marks except his own"* applies not only to marks that appear on the skin; it applies even more to the marks that appear on the soul. This is because **marks or faults, by their very nature, prevent one from seeing that he is afflicted.** No matter how egregious the fault, one will still be certain that everything is all right. For him to become aware of his own fault, someone from the outside must tell him that he is tamei. For the same reason, one also cannot purify oneself. It is very difficult to determine when one's fault is gone, just as it is difficult to determine when it sets in. **The nature of "marks" of this type is that they apply to the entire person, and it is very difficult to correctly assess them,** especially when their meaning is unclear. Even after one knows what the signs are, the most one can say is: *"There appears to be something like a mark on my house."*]emphasis added[

In all these matters, from slander and miserliness to haughtiness and the rest of the list, the question of ethical subtleties is so serious and complicated that there is almost no way of determining where the truth lies.

Speaking slander is a serious prohibition; on the other hand, it is a mitzvah to expose hypocrites.29 And if, by warning people that a certain person is a sinner, one performs a mitzva, it then becomes possible to constantly engage in the "mitzvah" of slander. A circular pattern begins: If a person seems wicked, one may slander him; the more slander that is spoken about him, the more wicked he seems, and the more one may continue to slander him. Even in the Chafetz Chayim's book Shemirat HaLashon, there are a few sub-paragraphs discussing the various loopholes by which one may slander a person in a permissible manner. An ordinary person will likely never come to this, but a great man sometimes does.

Pride, too, can be a very important trait, and can serve a lofty purpose. The Talmud says that a Torah scholar should possess *"an eighth of an eighth"* of pride,30 and of King Jehoshaphat it is written that *"his heart was elevated in the ways of G d."*31 Some people possess a small measure of pride – "an eighth of an eighth" – while others possess a larger, "elevated" measure.

"He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp"

The remedy for tzaraat is that the metzora must remove himself from all categories. The metzora does not go to a doctor in order to be cured. Rather, he is thrown out of the camp, out of human society – at most, he may interact with one other metzora – so that he should be entirely alone and engage in introspection.

Some of the ways in which people erroneously categorize themselves are based on social structures. If one constantly contrasts himself with others, then it will always be possible to find someone who is smaller and more contemptible than he is, someone who deserves to be vilified and slandered. It may then seem praiseworthy to oppress this other person physically, financially, and in any way possible.

When one is isolated with his tzaraat, one remains alone, and only then can one truly ponder one's own faults. Only after one is told that he is beset with faults and he is isolated with them can he begin to grapple with them until they disappear. If one remains isolated in this way for many years, it is because he has not dealt with his faults sufficiently. King Uzziyahu, for example, remained isolated until the day of his death, because he continued to feel that he was not at fault.

On the other hand, when a person is isolated, he is also liable to lose his sense of proportion. Hence, the Talmud says that one should not study alone, because one who studies alone is liable to err and then repeat the error over a long period of time.32 Faults, however, relate to subtleties in one's personal conduct that cannot always be measured against someone else. What is more, another person's counsel is helpful only up to a certain point and cannot reach the root of the matter.

Once, a group of Hasidim approached the Maggid of Mezeritch and told him that they lived far away and needed someone to be their guide and teacher. They suggested Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk)who in fact became a kind of successor to the Maggid after his death(and asked how they could determine whether he was the right man. What are the criteria by which to measure whether he is truly a great man? The Maggid responded, *"Ask him whether there exists any method of avoiding pride. If he gives you such a method, you will know that there is no substance to him."* When they posed the Maggid's question to Rabbi Menachem Mendel, he answered, *"What can I tell you? One person might wear sackcloth and filthy clothing, and his heart might still be full of pride, whereas someone else may walk erect and dress elegantly, yet his heart may be broken inside him. There is no method for this."*

There are some ailments for which a remedy exists, and there are some for which this is impossible. One who has become tamei by contact with a corpse must go to the Priest in order to be purified; one who has a different problem must go to the elders and sages for a solution. In the case of tzaraat, however, if one is already great enough to receive such an affliction, this type of treatment does not help him. Indeed, *the metzora does not go to the Priest to be cured; he goes to the Priest only after he is cured, so that he should look at the mark and issue a ruling. In all the stages of the process that precedes this ruling, even the Priest cannot offer him any help.*

The only recourse for the metzora is to sit alone. He must keep sitting for as long as it takes to discover what is wrong and to set things right. The metzora is sent out to think, to relieve him of his preoccupation with business, to stop him from giving public sermons. Until he rectifies his problems on his own, he remains a metzora, and if the mark intensifies, his tzaraat spreads.

To remain alone is one of the best ways to attain self-rectification. One begins to reflect more and more on oneself and on one's path, the outer shells of one's personality begin to fall off, and sometimes parts of a person that were hidden behind these shells are revealed.

In the course of Jewish history, mainly in the time of the First Temple, there were many prophets, all of who were extraordinary personalities who performed wonders in heaven and on earth, and yet none of this helped avert the destruction of the Temple and the exile. People sat and listened to the prophets and exclaimed*, "What a wonderful derashah! What language! What Hebrew! What a pleasure to hear!"*33 – and then they went to sleep. Only during the transition between the First Temple period and the Second Temple period can one see a change in Israel's attitude toward the prophets. During the Second Temple period, there was a fundamental change for the better – Judaism began to deal with other matters. Why did this happen?

Apparently, the period of destruction and exile, the period characterized by the verse, *"How does the city sit solitary,"*34 gave better moral instruction than all of the prophets combined. Apparently, solitude is incredibly effective. Then as now, people feel complacent, as long as they are in their own place, with an army to protect them and diplomatic relations with their neighbors – whether these neighbors are the Assyrians and the Egyptians or the Americans and the Russians – and with a great deal of money to build palaces across the country, all in accordance with national protocol. When the prophet comes and cries out in protest – it is easy to ignore him. But seventy years of *"How does the city sit solitary"* accomplished what all the prophets were unable to do.

Parshat Tazria does not conclude with the metzora's complete rectification; only in the next parshah do we reach this stage. In this parashah we are still dealing primarily with the *"isolated metzora,"* a metzora who has been given a warning. In the next parshah we learn how one who has gone through this entire period, who has experienced all that he needs to experience, can eventually make a full recovery.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Laws of the Impurity of Tzaraat 16:10; Guide for the Perplexed III:47.

2. Ketubbot 77b.

3. Commentary on the Mishnah, Nega'im 12:5.

4. Likkutei Torah, Tazria 22b.

5. Tazria 48a.
6. Bava Metzia 114b.

7. Lev. 13:2.

8. Lev. 13:9.

9. Berachot 5b.

10. Genesis Rabba 88:1.

11. II Kings 5:1.

12. II Chr. 26:4–5.

13. Y. Sanhedrin 10:2.

14. Lev. 26:27–28.

15. 25:25.

16. 25:35.

17. 25:39.

18. Kiddushin 20a.

19. Eccl. 7:20.

20. Berachot 18b.

21. 3:14.

22. Bava Kamma 12b.

23. Lev. 13:14–15.

24. see Rashi on Lev. 13:10.

25. see Tanchuma, Metzora 10.

26. II Kings 5:1.

27. Nega'im 2:5.

28. Nega'im 3:1.

29. Midrash Psalms 52.

30. Sotah 5a.

31. II Chr. 17:6.

32. Berachot 63b.

33. See Ezekiel 33:30–32.

34. Lam. 1:1.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel)Steinsaltz( )1937-2020(, one of the leading rabbis of the past century and author of many books, was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5105738/jewish/The-Subtle-Signals-of-the-Tzaraat.htm

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Tazria - Metzora: The Earthenware Vessel

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

The Earthenware Vessel

> *An earthenware vessel ... must be shattered, but any wooden vessel may be immersed in water.*)Lev. 15:12(

Allegorically, the human being, formed from the dust of the earth, is an earthenware vessel. Just as an earthenware vessel cannot be defiled by external contact with a source of defilement that does not move it, so is our inner Divine essence impervious to defilement by contact with matters external to it, i.e., the materialism of our physical world, which cannot move our Divine essence.

G-d created us as physical creatures with physical needs, and moreover, He created us such that we naturally enjoy fulfilling these needs. Therefore, He does not require us to negate this enjoyment, only to refine ourselves so that we can use the materiality of this world as means of enhancing our Divine consciousness, rather than allowing our enjoyment of materiality to impair our Divine consciousness.

In order to refine ourselves this way, it is imperative that we remain humble – considering ourselves mere "earthenware vessels," as unassuming as the dust from which we were formed.

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom 3*

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Va'eira from our *Daily Wisdom 3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant wisdom, strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Shabbat Shalom

Volume 31, Issue 27 **Shabbat Parashat Tazria-Metzora** **5785 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Plague of Evil Speech

The Rabbis moralised the condition of tzara'at – often translated as leprosy – the subject that dominates both Tazria and Metzora. It was, they said, a punishment rather than a medical condition. Their interpretation was based on the internal evidence of the Mosaic books themselves. Moses 'hand became leprous when he expressed doubt about the willingness of the people to believe in his mission (Ex. 4:6-7). Miriam was struck by leprosy when she spoke against Moses (Num. 12:1-15). The metzora (leper) was a motzi shem ra: a person who spoke slightingly about others.

Evil speech, lashon hara, was considered by the Sages to be one of the worst sins of all. Here is how Maimonides summarises it: The Sages said: there are three transgressions for which a person is punished in this world and has no share in the world come – idolatry, illicit sex, and bloodshed – and evil speech is as bad as all three combined. They also said: whoever speaks with an evil tongue is as if he denied God . . . Evil speech kills three people – the one who says it, the one who accepts it, and the one about whom it is said. Hilchot Deot 7:3

Is it so? Consider just two of many examples. In the early 13th century, a bitter dispute broke out between devotees and critics of Maimonides. For the former, he was one of the greatest Jewish minds of all time. For the latter, he was a dangerous thinker whose works contained heresy and whose influence led people to abandon the commandments.

There were ferocious exchanges. Each side issued condemnations and excommunications against the other. There were pamphlets and counter-pamphlets, sermons and counter-sermons, and for while French and Spanish Jewry were convulsed by the controversy. Then, in 1232, Maimonides 'books were burned by the Dominicans. The shock brought a brief respite; then extremists desecrated Maimonides 'tomb in Tiberius. In the early 1240s, following the Disputation of Paris, Christians burned all the copies of the Talmud they could find. It was one of the great tragedies of the Middle Ages.

What was the connection between the internal Jewish struggle and the Christian burning of Jewish books? Did the Dominicans take advantage of Jewish accusations of heresy against Maimonides, to level their own charges? Was it simply that they were able to take advantage of the internal split within Jewry, to proceed with their own persecutions without fear of concerted Jewish reprisals? One way or another, throughout the Middle Ages, many of the worst Christian persecutions of Jews were either incited by converted Jews, or exploited internal weaknesses of the Jewish community.

Moving to the modern age, one of the most brilliant exponents of Orthodoxy was R. Meir Loeb ben Yechiel Michal Malbim (1809-1879), Chief Rabbi of Rumania. An outstanding scholar, whose commentary to Tanach is one of the glories of the nineteenth century, he was at first welcomed by all groups in the Jewish community as a man of learning and religious integrity. Soon, however, the more 'enlightened 'Jews discovered to their dismay that he was a vigorous traditionalist, and they began to incite the civil authorities against him. In posters and pamphlets they portrayed him as a benighted relic of the Middle Ages, a man opposed to progress and the spirit of the age.

One Purim, they sent him a gift of a parcel of food which included pork and crabs, with an accompanying message: 'We, the local progressives, are honoured to present these delicacies and tasty dishes from our table as a gift to our luminary. 'Eventually, in response to the campaign, the government withdrew its official recognition of the Jewish community, and of Malbim as its Chief Rabbi, and banned him from delivering sermons in the Great Synagogue. On Friday, 18 March 1864, policemen surrounded his house early in the morning, arrested and imprisoned him. After the Sabbath, he was placed on a ship and taken to the Bulgarian border, where he was released on condition that he never return to Rumania. This is how the Encyclopaedia Judaica describes the campaign:

M. Rosen has published various documents which disclose the false accusations and calumnies Malbim's Jewish-assimilationist enemies wrote against him to the Rumanian government. They accused him of disloyalty and of impeding social assimilation between Jews and non-Jews by insisting on adherence to the dietary laws, and said, 'This Rabbi by his conduct and prohibitions wishes to impede our progress. 'As a result of this, the Prime Minister of Rumania issued a proclamation against the 'ignorant and insolent 'Rabbi... In consequence the minister refused to grant rights to the Jews of Bucharest, on the grounds that the Rabbi of the community was 'the sworn enemy of progress'.

Similar stories could be told about several other outstanding scholars – among them, R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes, R. Azriel Hildesheimer, R. Yitzhak Reines, and even the late Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik of blessed memory, who was brought to court in Boston in 1941 to face trumped-up charges by the local Jewish community. Even these shameful episodes were only a continuation of the vicious war waged against the Hassidic movement by their opponents, the mitnagdim, which saw many Hassidic leaders (among them the first Rebbe of Habad, R. Shneur Zalman of Ladi) imprisoned on false testimony given to the local authorities by other Jews.

For a people of history, we can be bewilderingly obtuse to the lessons of history. Time and again, unable to resolve their own conflicts civilly and graciously, Jews slandered their opponents to the civil authorities, with results that were disastrous to the Jewish community as a whole. Despite the fact that the whole of rabbinic Judaism is a culture of argument; despite the fact that the Talmud explicitly says that the school of Hillel had its views accepted because they were 'gentle, modest, taught the views of their opponents as well as their own, and taught their opponents ' views before their own '(Eruvin 13b) – despite this, Jews have continued to excoriate, denounce, even excommunicate those whose views they did not understand, even when the objects of their scorn (Maimonides, Malbim, and the rest) were among the greatest-ever defenders of Orthodoxy against the intellectual challenges of their age.

Of what were the accusers guilty? Only evil speech. And what, after all, is evil speech? Mere words. Yet words have consequences. Diminishing their opponents, the self-proclaimed defenders of the faith diminished themselves and their faith. They managed to convey the impression that Judaism is simple-

minded, narrow, incapable of handling complexity, helpless in the face of challenge, a religion of anathemas instead of arguments, excommunication instead of reasoned debate. Maimonides and Malbim took their fate philosophically. Yet one weeps to see a great tradition brought so low.

What an astonishing insight it was to see leprosy – that disfiguring disease – as a symbol and symptom of evil speech. For we truly are disfigured when we use words to condemn, not communicate; to close rather than open minds; when we use language as a weapon and wield it brutally. The message of Metzora remains. Linguistic violence is no less savage than physical violence, and those who afflict others are themselves afflicted. Words wound. Insults injure. Evil speech destroys communities. Language is God's greatest gift to humankind and it must be guarded if it is to heal, not harm.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"Then he shall sprinkle [the mixture] seven times upon the person being purified from the tzara'at; he shall purify him and set the live bird free upon the open field" (Leviticus 14:7).

One of the strangest and most primitive-sounding rituals of the Bible surrounds the purification of the individual afflicted with "tzara'at," a skin disease that apparently, at least in biblical times, struck those guilty of slanderous gossip (metzora – one who is afflicted with tzara'at derives from motzi-ra, an individual who spreads evil talk). Because the root cause of the malady was spiritual rather than physiological, it was the priest – the kohen – rather than a doctor who had the responsibility of examining the white spots that appeared on the skin of the individual to determine whether quarantine was necessary, and then – if he was able to declare the person free of the disease – initiating a process of purification.

It is with this particular ritual that our portion of Metzora opens. The kohen commands two birds to be taken; the first to be slaughtered in an earthenware vessel, its blood mingled with the living waters of a spring, and the second – kept alive – to be immersed within the mingled blood waters in the earthenware vessel. The waters are sprinkled upon the person cured of the malady, whereupon the live bird is allowed to fly away, leaving the city limits.

This ritual act of purification is fraught with symbolism. There are few biblical infractions as serious as speaking slander; three different prohibitions recorded in Scripture proscribe such speech. The first is gossip regarding another, which may in itself be harmless, but which is no one else's business and can easily lead to evil talk (the prohibition of rechilut – when, for example, one tells another the cost of a neighbor's new house). The second is lashon hara – downright slander – reporting the negative action of another which may actually be true but ought not be spread.

The third and worst of all is motzi shem ra – disseminating a lie about an innocent person. From such unnecessary chatter, reputations can be broken, families can be destroyed and lives can be lost ("with the negative turn of their noses, they can become responsible for the death of another").

Hence, three people incur penalty for such talk: the one who tells it, the one who listens to it and the one who spreads it further. And when the Kohen Gadol (high priest) appears once a year before God in the Holy of Holies with the incense sacrifice, it is for this infraction against slander that he seeks atonement on behalf of the Jewish nation.

With this in mind, let us analyze the symbolism of the purification process. In idolatry, the point of offering a sacrifice was to propitiate the gods – idolaters believed that the world was run by the warring gods and humans could only seek to bribe them. In Judaism, by contrast, humans are full partners with God in perfecting this world. Our sacrifices represent the one who brings them, with the sin-offering animal standing in the place of the owner, "telling" him that it is he who deserved to die but for Divine loving-kindness, and the whole burnt offering "telling" him that he ought devote "all of himself" to the service of the Almighty in the perfection of the world.

In the case of the metzora, the slanderous, scandalous chattering twitters are symbolized by the two birds; one is slaughtered as gossip is considered akin to taking a life, and the other is sent off to fly away.

The best way to explain this symbolism is by means of a remarkable Hassidic story told of someone who asked his Rebbe how he might gain Divine forgiveness for his sin of slander. The Rebbe instructed him to confess his sin and beg forgiveness of those whom he had slandered; then he instructed him to take a feather pillow, bring it to the marketplace late in the afternoon when the wind was strongest, to open the covering, allow the feathers to fly, and then set about collecting all the scattered feathers.

The distraught Hasid returned to the Rebbe that evening, reporting that gathering the feathers was a "mission impossible." "So is it with slander," replied the Rebbe; "You never know how far your evil words have spread, since each person you told may well have told his friends…"

Rav Yisrael Salanter explained why the portions Tazria and Metzora follow Shemini, with its laws of kashrut: because what comes out of your mouth is even more significant that what goes into your mouth.

Eleanor Roosevelt is credited with saying this: "Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, small minds discuss people."

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Walls Which Speak in Red and Green

"The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, 'When you come into the Land of Canaan which I give to you as an inheritance and I shall give you the plague of leprosy in the houses of the land of your inheritance.'" (Leviticus 14:34)

The disease known as leprosy has engendered dread in the hearts of people, especially in times gone by when it was apparently more widespread and exceedingly contagious. In biblical times, the priests (kohanim) would determine whether a skin discoloration or scab was indeed leprous – and, if so, the hapless leper would be rendered ritually impure and exiled from society. From the biblical religious perspective, this tzara'at emanated from a serious moral deficiency, generally identified as slander.

An especially problematic aspect of these laws of tzara'at is the fact that not only individuals but even walls of houses could become infected by this ritually impure discoloration. Do walls have minds, souls, consciences or moral choices which allow for punishment? And stranger still, the Bible describes the phenomenon of "leprosy of houses" in almost positive, gift-of-God terms:

"The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, "when you come into the Land of Canaan which I give to you as an inheritance and I shall give you the plague of leprosy in the houses of the land of your inheritance." (Leviticus 14:34)

How are we to understand this biblical reference to the "divine gift" of the leprous walls? And third, for individuals, the tzara'at malady is expressed as a white discoloration, whereas for walls, white spots are not at all problematic, the only thing they attest to is mold! Green and red are the dangerous colors for walls (Lev. 14:36 ,37). Why the difference?

Nahmanides, the twelfth-century commentary who is an especial champion of the unique importance of the Land of Israel for the people of Israel, sees the phenomenon of the leprous walls as an expression of the intensely concentrated moral sensitivity of our holy land: the sanctity of Israel, home of the Divine Presence (Shekhina), cannot abide within its boundaries a home in which slander is spoken.

Hence the walls of such a house in Israel will naturally show the effects of words of gossip which can destroy lives.

Maimonides sees another benefit to the "leprosy of the homes"– an explicit warning to cease and desist from speaking slander: "This is a sign and a wonder to warn people against indulging in malicious speech (lashon hara). If they do recount slanderous tales, the walls of their homes will change; and if the inhabitants maintain their wickedness, the garments upon them will change" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Impurity of Tzara'at 16:10).

Rashi suggests a practical application for the "gift of the leprous walls": "It was a happy tiding for them when the plague (of leprosy) came upon (their homes). This is because the Amorite Canaanites had hidden treasures of gold in the walls of their homes during the forty years when Israel was in the desert, and because of the leprous plagues the walls were taken apart and [the treasures] were found" (Rashi, Lev. 14:34).

I would suggest that Rashi's commentary may be given a figurative rather than a literal spin. The walls of a house represent a family, the family which inhabits that house; and every family has its own individual culture and climate, scents and sensitivities, tales and traditions. A house may also represent many generations of families who lived there; the values, faith commitments and lifestyles which animated those families and constituted their continuity. The sounds, smells and songs, the character, culture and commitments which are absorbed – and expressed – by the walls of a house, are indeed a treasure which is worthy of discovery and exploration. The walls of a home impart powerful lessons; hidden in those walls is a significant treasure-trove of memories and messages for the present and future generations. Perhaps it is for this reason that the nation of Israel is called the house of Israel throughout the Bible.

From this perspective we can now understand the biblical introduction to "house-leprosy." This hidden power of the walls is a present as well as a plague, a gift as well as a curse. Do the walls emit the fragrance of Shabbat challah baking in the oven or the smells of cheap liquor? Are the sounds which seep through the crevices sounds of Torah study, prayer and words of affection or are they experiences of tale-bearing, porn and anger? The good news inherent in the leprosy of the walls is the potency of family: the very same home environment which can be so injurious can also be exceedingly beneficial. It all depends upon the "culture of the table" which the family creates and which the walls absorb – and sometimes emit.

With this understanding, it is instructive to note the specific colorations – or discolorations – which render the walls ritually unclean: "And he (the kohen – priest) shall examine the leprous plague penetratingly embedded in the walls of the house, whether they are bright green or bright red…" (Lev. 14:37). Can it be that green is identified with money and materialism (yerukim in modern Hebrew, an apt description of American dollars), and red identified with blood and violence? A home which imparts materialistic goals as the ideal and/or insensitivity to the shedding of blood – remember that our sages compared slander or character assassination to the shedding of blood – is certainly deserving of the badge of impurity! And is not the Palestinian flag waved so ardently by suicide bombers, red and green and white (white being the initial sign of leprosy).

And finally, Rashi suggested that there was an Amorite-Canaanite treasure which the inhabitants placed in the walls of their homes in Israel while the Israelites dallied in the desert rejecting the divine challenge of the conquest of Israel. Might not this interpretation be suggesting that the indigenous seven nations, as well as present-day Palestinians, do indeed have a treasure which they impart to the children through the walls of the houses? This treasure is the belief that the land is important, that the connection to the land is cardinal for every nation which claims a homeland and respects its past. The land must be important enough to fight and even die for, since it contains the seed of our eternity; only those committed to their past deserve to enjoy a blessed future.

I am certainly not suggesting terrorism against innocent citizens and nihilistic, Moloch-like suicide bombing, which perverts love of land into a rejection of life and destruction of fundamental humanistic values. The Torah declares the ritual impurity of Red, Green and White! But many Israeli post-Zionist leaders are forgetting the indelible linkage between a nation and its land as an expression of its commitment to eternal ideals and the continuity between its past and future. Tragically we all too often only begin to appreciate the importance of our homeland when the Palestinian suicide attackers threaten to take it away from us by their vicious attacks. But perhaps sacred lessons can even be learned from purveyors of impurity.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Does Mussar Help?

Towards the end of Parshas Metzorah, the pasuk says: "You shall separate the Children of Israel from their contamination; and they shall not die as a result of their contamination if they contaminate My Mishkan that is among them." (Vayikra 15:31). The simple reading of this pasuk is that when Bnei Yisrael are tameh (impure), they should not, in a state of impurity, go into the holy places where they are forbidden to enter, lest they die from that impurity. However, homiletically, the sefer Yismach Yehudah cites the following interesting vort from a drasha of Rav Yosef Nechemia Kornitzer (a great grandson of the Chasam Sofer, who was the Chief Rabbi of Cracow, Poland, in the early part of the 20th century):

Sometimes we talk to our children or to our students or to our congregants until we are blue in the face. We wonder, does it make an impression? Are our words taken seriously? Do people change? Perhaps this is most relevant for professionals who do this for a living. Do all the things that we say, year after year, really help? Do speeches help? Do drashos help? Does mussar (chastisement) help? Does lecturing to our children really help?

Rav Kornitzer suggests that we need to bear in mind that it may not help now, and it may not help six months from now or a year from now. But, at some point, at some time in the future, maybe the lesson will hit home.

I don't know how Rav Yosef Nechemia Kornitzer explained the mashal that he gave, but today it is easy for us to imagine what this is like. Namely, the "mussar" is in the "cloud." Where is all this data? It is in the "cloud." Where is the "cloud?"? There is not a cloud in the sky! But we know this concept that something can be not in front of us, yet when we need to access it, it is somehow there for us to access. It is the same with mussar and with lecturing our children. It is there. It hasn't penetrated yet, but it can penetrate.

He references the pasuk "And these matters that I command you today shall be upon your heart (al levavecha)." (Devorim 5:6). It does not say b'soch levavecha (within your heart) because sometimes it has not yet penetrated the heart. However, at least it remains al levavecha – upon your heart. One day, maybe, just perhaps, it will penetrate the heart and will be b'soch levavecha.

This is why the pasuk says "…v'lo yamusu m'tumosam" (Vayikra 15:31), which means you talk to people and you tell them what is right. Even though it might not help now or even ten years from now, they will not die from their impurity. How many people do we know that return at the end of their days? They don't die in their state of impurity because at the end of their days, they in fact realize that what they were told so many years earlier was correct, and they in fact do come back.

Ironically, I was recently speaking with someone in Eretz Yisrael who told me the

following interesting incident that happened only a few days ago. (This was April 2016.) I believe this story brings home the point that I am trying to make:

A fellow in Eretz Yisrael has a distant relative who was born and raised in a small town in Pennsylvania in the first half of the twentieth century. The relative's father was a rav and a shochet, who tried his best to educate his son in the proper Torah path, including sending him to a yeshiva. The boy only lasted in the yeshiva for two weeks. He hated it. He left the yeshiva and eventually left Yiddishkeit. He never got married. He does not have a wife or children. He is a man alone in the world. From what I gather, he must be in his late sixties or early seventies.

For whatever reason, this relative got an inspiration: I want to go to Israel. I want to daven at the Kosel HaMaaravi. He takes his Bar Mitzvah tefillin, which he has not put on in a half century, and has plans to visit the kosel, put on his tefillin, and daven there. He hooks up with some Federation tour and goes with this tour and their tour guide on the Federation tour to Eretz Yisrael.

The person who is relating the story finds out that his long-lost cousin is coming to Israel and he decides that he will get in touch with him, take him around, and give him a real tour of Eretz Yisrael. They meet in a certain place. The Israeli says to his American relative, "Have you been to the Kosel yet?" His cousin responds, "No, I have not been to the Kosel yet." The Israeli said, "Great. So let's go now!" The American says "No, not now. Maybe later."

"What's the problem?" his Israeli cousin presses him. "This is why you came. You want to put your tefillin on and daven at the kosel." The cousin is hesitant. Finally he says "I can't go!"

"Why can't you go?" The long-lost cousin finally explains "I can't go to the Kosel with a cross."

The Israeli cousin is incredulous: "What are you doing with a cross?" The American explains that while he was on the Federation tour they went through the Armenian Quarter of the Old City. "I have a very good Christian friend back home in America. I wanted to buy him a cross from Israel as a present. I asked the rabbi who is leading the Federation tour if it was okay to buy a cross for my Christian friend in America. He told me it was."

He bought the tselem (cross) and put it in his bag, and is now walking around Jerusalem with a tselem in his bag. He tells his relative "I cannot go to the Kosel with a cross in my bag."

This Israeli cousin told my friend this story and his friend told it to me. He then commented: This fellow has not had any connection to Yiddishkeit in maybe sixty years. He is putting on tefillin now for probably the first time in more than fifty years, or even more! But he still has a sensitivity, a feeling, that a person does not go to the Kosel HaMaaravi with a tselem in his bag.

This is an example of "…You shall not die in your state of impurity." The person left Yiddishkeit, he had a bad experience in yeshiva, he did not want to have anything to do with Judaism, and he has not kept who knows what for all these years, but there is something in the Jewish heart that remains "al levavecha" – upon your heart. It was ON the heart. It was "in the cloud." After all these years, it finally penetrated that you do not go to the Kosel with a tselem in your bag.

This is a lesson to all of us, whether you are a rav, a rabbi, a rebbi, a teacher, or even a parent. If you preach and preach and preach and it does not seem to make a difference, yes, it does! "You shall warn… and they shall not die in their state of impurity."

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

We have just commenced what is probably the happiest month on the Jewish calendar. It's the month of Nisan and as many of us know, throughout this month we do not say the Tachanun prayer and that is because nearly the entire month is festive.

Now of course we know that from the middle of the month until the end, that's the festival of Passover and then the days thereafter and soon after that is Rosh Chodesh, but what about the first half of the month?

Well, we know from the Torah that during the first 12 days of Nisan, that's when the Nesi'im, the Princes, the heads of the tribes, brought a sacrifice to inaugurate the new altar in the sanctuary in the wilderness. On each day, a different Nasi brought his sacrifice.

So therefore, the first 12 days are festive. However, I have a question; surely that day was only festive for one single person? Perhaps, at most, it was festive for his whole tribe – but that is only one twelfth of the nation, the entire people didn't celebrate and yet today none of us say Tachanun during that period?

I believe that a very powerful message emerges from this.

When it comes to sadness, we so often readily identify with the worries, the troubles, and the sorrow of others.

This is happening right now at a time in Israel when there is so much sadness and as a nation, we are reaching out with so much altruism and sympathy for all those who are there.

But from the month of Nisan, we are taught that it is not just during times of sorrow that we should empathise with others, it is also when they are happy.

When a person is having a Simcha, we should rejoice with them. Even if there is one single person rejoicing, that is a reason for the entire nation to be happy and that's why for the first half of Nisan as well, we as a people celebrate.

May Hashem bless us, that in the same way as we are expressing sorrow with all those who are grieving right now, so may we soon all celebrate together, the great redemption of our people.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

"Tum'ah & Tahara" – Definitions in Flux…
Rabbi Daniel and Rebbetzin Ilana Epstein

The Torah portions of Tazria and Metzora, appearing as they do in the middle of the Book of Leviticus (Vayikra), deal with the epicentre of the Law of the Priests ("Torat Kohanim").

Engaging with various physical discharges from or maladies of the human body, male and female, the Torah states that when these flows or lesions appear, the status of the individual concerned moves from Tahor ("pure") to Tamei ("impure").

These definitions are in quotation marks because they might not do justice to the change of status in every situation.

To be "tamei" implies experiencing a discharge that is somehow connected to death, or the inability to support life. In contrast, to be "tahor" means to be in a state of life-giving capacity.

For example, when a woman concludes her monthly cycle, the discharge of blood and material from her body demonstrates that the life-giving capacity of the womb is temporarily concluded, until the next month's cycle replaces all the material necessary to potentially harness and initiate life once again. As a result, her body moves objectively from "tahor" – life-giving – to "tamei" – unable to sustain new life.

The period of being tamei – by not being able to procreate life – indicates a distancing from God in a comparative sense. God is, by

definition, the pure articulation of Life and, as we emulate God as creatures "created in His image", we are "like Him" when giving life and "unlike Him" when we cannot do so.

As a result, we become naturally and spiritually distanced from Him, and so coming into contact with a dead body, for example, similarly causes us to experience "non-life". As a result, we find ourselves assuming a status of tamei, until we can return to a period of "tahara" through the passage of time and processes of purification.

However, in recent days, we have all witnessed the tragic loss of life in terrorist attacks in Israel. The intense outpouring of both grief and emunah ("deep faith and conviction") have been overwhelming with the families themselves leading seemingly superhuman expressions of reaffirming their faith in God and in the passage of history and destiny of the Jewish People.

At this time, I am struggling with these definitions of tum'ah and tahara because as we are brought into contact with death, I find myself being drawn closer to God, not further away, and my faith deepens in a desperate attempt to find the strength to move forward.

I am finding that the traditional status of tahara (purity/closeness) is lacking in articulating my expression of closeness to God, as I find a much more visceral experience of vulnerability and d'veikut ("cleaving/closeness") in the encounter with tum'ah (impurity/distance).

Maybe in the day-to-day fluctuations of life, these definitions are correct, but at the emotional and spiritual extremes, there may be room for a philosophical redrawing of the lines; to help us navigate the unknowable and the unspeakable.

May we draw strength from our faith at all times and in all circumstances. Amen.

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Lepers and Kohanim in Current Times: Contemplations on Parshat Metzora
Vered Lifschitz
The Evil Neighbor / Zelda

As the eve of Passover descended,
and the flames consumed the leaven
in every courtyard,
and the chimney's broom swept,
her garment charred,
she bounded towards me,
her words racing like lightning,
tears cascading:
"You, standing there opposite," she cried,
"care not for me,
my charred attire, and you utter no solace!
Behold, I am ailing, profoundly so, consumed by despair."
A perplexing assertion,
uttered from the depths of a miserable soul,
who had only recently rented a room among us.
A foreign and bold and impudent claim it was.
Deep within me, my soul enfolded
her frenzied longing, kissing her yearning for softness.

…

Whenever she opened her door, children hid themselves,
as did the neighbors, both women and men.
Her chilly laughter pursued
our sheltered existence,
penetrating the decorum of our days:

– Do not deceive yourselves with the guise of goodness,
her wild laughter proclaimed.
– Do not deceive yourselves with the facade of your prayer.
– Do not deceive yourselves with the semblance of your kindness,
– Do not deceive yourselves with the illusion of your joy.
– And do not deceive yourselves that your happiness is complete.

When it became known
that she had departed to distant parts,
and that the tempest had waned and she had vanished,
we breathed with greater ease, unlatched our windows.
Sound the drums,
blow the shofars,
play the flutes and lyres.
Now we may repose.
Prepare the beds,
for tonight we shall sleep.

…

I knew
that we had conversed of her living soul,
consumed day by day,
as of a plague.
For nought her imprecations were cast upon us;
her smoldering hands
attempting to embrace our desolate souls,
bereft of imagination.
In vain she had fluttered vainly, a flickering flame,
before me with her scarlet, tattered banners,
so that I might liberate myself from my own enchanted circle
to uncover the essence of her existence…
Vered Lifschitz

The poem below is a segment from a longer poem, by Zelda, entitled "The Evil Neighbor." Who is this evil neighbor? The evil neighbor is the one who disrupts our decent serenity; who interferes with the bourgeois flow of life, and, perhaps, even invades the comfortable space of our traditions and customs. The evil neighbor is the one who does not fit into the human fabric of our community. She is the woman whom the neighborhood children nickname 'witch'. She is most probably not beautiful; nor is she pleasant, intelligent or wealthy.

She spoils our landscape, thereby disturbing our peace. We will feel relieved, and sleep better when we know that she has left the neighborhood for another place, and it doesn't matter where – as long as we don't have to look at her and acknowledge her existence. When we look upon her, the protective walls of our life seem to collapse; our self-perception of being benevolent and compassionate individuals seems to dissipate.

The evil neighbor cries out with a "yearning for softness"; a cry that conceals a painful life story – one of constant struggle against rejection.

The portion of Metzora commences with the verses: "This shall be the ordinance for the leper upon the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the kohen. And the kohen shall go forth outside the camp, and the kohen shall look, and behold, the plague of leprosy has been healed from the leper…"

In the portion of Tazria, the kohen proclaims the condition of the individual afflicted with tzara'at and takes him outside the camp. Yet, this action alone is insufficient; the kohen's responsibility extends to reintegrating the metzora, the leper, into the fabric of society, constituting a sacred duty to both the afflicted and the community.

The social task with which the kohen is charged – purifying and absolving the one afflicted with tzara'at – is also a religious and spiritual one. In fact, it conveys the following religious assertion: under certain circumstances that are potentially harmful to society, individuals should be temporarily removed from its fold, as part of a process of spiritual renewal and rehabilitation. Nonetheless, it remains our responsibility to facilitate these individuals 'return to the societal embrace when conditions allow, be it upon their healing, or when society itself is ready and resilient, and is no longer threatened by the affliction.

Our pursuit of an orderly existence falters when individuals depart without the prospect of reintegration into the social tapestry of our lives.

Today, there are no worshipping kohanim, and there is no leprosy, for that matter (some even claim a cure has been discovered). Nonetheless, throughout the ages, those afflicted with leprosy were banished from

society's embrace, and cast out from the rhythms of communal life. These outcasts received few visits, and only few had the courage to inquire after them and infuse their isolated existence with the breath of life. However, there were exceptional individuals, like Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi, who would sit and engage in Torah study with them, or Rabbi Aryeh Levin, who would make the journey to the leper hospital in Jerusalem to offer solace. In our times, leprosy has been replaced with other afflictions which lead to social isolation.

While physical leprosy may no longer afflict us, the metaphorical leprosy has expanded its reach. It has transitioned from a mere physical ailment to a stigmatizing label attached to those whom society regards with disdain, casting them out into the shadows even in our time. When we encounter them, we instinctively cross to the opposite sidewalk. We confine them beyond the boundaries of our community, placing them outside the realm of societal norms.

To many of these individuals, fortune has not been kind, yet their mere presence "irritates" us, not out of malice on their part, nor because they have wronged us, but simply because fate has dealt them an unfavorable hand. They stand apart from us, failing to fit neatly into the mold of societal expectations we have crafted. They may bear physical disabilities, cognitive challenges, mental anguish, or any number of significant hardships. They exist as "others" in every conceivable sense.

And then there is another kind of "others" – those who think differently from us. And, as such, we label them; we demonize them; we engage in battle against them, often without deigning to lend an ear to the truths beating within their hearts.

Today, there are no worshipping kohanim.

Therefore, the responsibility to reintegrate the afflicted back into the fold of society rests upon our own shoulders. It falls upon each and every one of us. This is a religious obligation.

Our task is not to change these "others", but to acknowledge their otherness and include them in the circle of life, as well as in our personal circle of life.

We must look upon our "evil neighbors," those who stir unrest within us, who attempt to arouse our souls – not with disdain for their idiosyncrasies, but with an outstretched hand, inviting them inward. Rather than showing off our imagined garments of righteousness, we must remember that our society needs these "others" to be a part of us.

Levinas sees in the face of the other, a plea directed at the one who gazes upon him, a demand for response, not in words, but in actions, in attitude. The other demands of me to acknowledge his otherness and thereby reach out to him. This is my ethical duty. I cannot simply observe from the sidelines. The other demands engagement; he demands responsibility from me. The other demands action and hospitality; he requires his nakedness to be clothed; he insists that I inconvenience myself and deviate from my comfortable path of life in order to come closer to him.

We live in a time when there are no worshipping kohanim, and it seems that leprosy has also vanished from the world. But the principle still stands. There are "lepers," and we are required to be the kohanim who purify them and bring them back into the camp.

This year, we will read Parshat Metzora on Shabbat Hagadol, and two days later we will burn our chametz after cleaning the house, scrubbing the kitchen, and polishing the windows to perfection. Perhaps our untainted windows might afford us a better view of those "others", our modern-day lepers, such that we will reach out to them and invite them to enter our haven.

"Let all who are hungry come and eat, let all who are in need come and celebrate Passover. This year we are here, next year in the land of Israel. This year we are slaves, next year we will be free."

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

A Day of Good Tidings

Our Haftorah for this morning records one of the more fascinating chapters in the early history of our people. Four lepers who, in keeping with Biblical law, were outside the camp of Israel, were hungry and found themselves near starvation. They decided that it was no use to try to reenter the community, because famine reigned in the Land of Israel at the time. Instead, they decided to take their chances and proceed to Aram, what is today Syria, and what was even in those days the sworn enemy of Israel. If they kill us, they argued, we are no worse off than we are now; and if they let us live, why then we shall we survive. As they approached the fortified city of Aram, the Bible tells us that G-d performed a miracle, and the sound of their approach was in the ears of the Syrians like that of a great army on the march. The Syrians were dumbfounded by the thought that the Israelite king might have hired the Hittites and Egyptian mercenaries to do them battle. Thereupon the Syrians panicked, and leaving Aram in the middle of the day upon a moment's notice, they all fled and deserted the city. When the four lepers entered the ghost city, they filled themselves with what they found and then they said to each other, we do not do right to care only for ourselves for yom besorah hu, v'anu mach'shim--today is a day of good tidings, and shall we be silent? As patriotic Israelites, they returned to the Land of Israel and notified the guard at the gate that he should tell the king that they alighted upon Aram and v'hinei ein sham ish ve'kol adam--behold there is no man there, neither the voice of a human being, ki im ha-sus assur, ve'ha-chamor assur, v'ohalim ka-asher hemah - but the horse is tied to the stake, and the donkeys are tied, and the tents are as they were. Aram has suddenly been deserted and it is the perfect time for an Israelite attack against its mortal enemy. In this manner the four lepers were instrumental in achieving a victory of Israel over Syria. This story is an interesting recollection from the Jewish past. But if it is included as a Haftorah which is read and re-read every year, then it must be more than that: it must have ramifications for all times and it must have a special relevance for us of this day. Indeed, I believe that its message is most appropriate to us of 1961.

There comes a time in the life of man-or the life of a people-when he or it realizes that the day is a yom besorah, a day of tidings, a day when an important message makes him restless, urging him to speak out. At a time of this sort, when he feels impelled to say something significant and urgent to the world, he has no right to be silent and to suppress the message which restlessly stirs within him. And one of the major things that we of our age must talk about, expose, and bring to the attention of the world is this: that our life has become such that ki im ha-sus assur, ve'ha-chamor assur, v'ohalim ka-asher hema--everything seems to be functioning smoothly, there is every evidence of "business as usual"--but unfortunately, v'hinei ein sham ish ve'kol adam--the man is missing; the voice of humanity is absent. The whole machinery of life and society seems to be so well lubricated, but at the center we do not find the humanness; there is no feeling of compassion. There is no voice of protest raised against injustice.

Our society is essentially based upon the pattern of Aram--a deserted ghost city. Everything seems to be functioning smoothly: communications and transportation, business and finance, universities and laboratories- but at the core: v'henei ein sham ish ve'kol adam--instead of hte warm heartbeat of individual human beings, there is only the grinding of gears and the hum of electronic machines. One of the basic ills of contemporary society is that it is so thoroughly mechanized that it has become dehumanized. The individual human being has been depreciated. Man as such has become depersonalized and has been reduced to a cog in a tremendous machine. We no longer think in terms of individuals; we think of individuals only as little units of society. We do not conceive any longer of patients, but of hospital beds. We do not concern ourselves with hungry children, we count the number of mouths we must feed. We fail to consider the unfortunate victim of an accident, and his widow and orphans; he is only one of the casualty rates on a holiday. Man has been reduced to a statistic, a thing.

Even in the ideological sense, the ish and the kol adam have been banished from life. For the last three hundred years, since the onset of the

modern era, a mechanistic philosophy has been dominant. According to this philosophy all the world is a machine, of which all parts function until they run down. Even man is a machine--and he does what he does because he must do it, because he has no choice, because man is a creature of habit and circumstance and necessity. He may think that he does what he wants to do; in truth, however, he does it because he must do it and not otherwise. Man is not really a free agent; he is only another screw in the great machine of the universe. He must function in his capacity, mechanically, just like the sus, and chamor and ohalim. He has lost his humanity, his freedom. And as a result of this mechanistic philosophy which has banished human freedom, people have become confirmed in their irresponsibility and have learned to coat it with a respectable veneer of sophistry and sophistication.

In a world of this sort, all Jews must recognize a yom besorah, a time when their message is of the utmost importance if the humanity of man is to be salvaged. Israel dare not be silent. It must proclaim for all the world that man was created in the Image of G-d, that he is a thinking and feeling human being, not a thing; that it is not true that he is just a little more advanced than the animals--rather, he is but "little lower than the angels." Man, Israel must teach the world, is unique. Every individual human being is absolutely irreplaceable. These are good tidings that we must this day pronounce for all this world to hear. We must restore the value of man up to its former dignity.

The historic trial that is now taking place in Jerusalem has fortunately gone beyond the question of merely what to do with one man who is the greatest murderer of all times. The proceedings are beginning to turn on the crime, rather than the criminal. All the material is now present for a great lesson for our generation, the generation that has grown up and matured after the war: a new insight into man and his capacity for depravity and decadence. One would think that this impact would hit the world like a ton of bricks. Instead, ki im ha-sus assur,

ve'ha-chamor assur, v'ohalim ka-asher hemah. Everything functions normally, the busses run and the elevators go, the radio blares, and the television records, the newspapers are read and stock is exchanged - v'hinei ein sham ish ve'kol adam, but the humanity of man which should make him rise to new heights of indignation, has remained essentially muted. A mass circulation magazine has even begun to complain that the news from the trial has become boring And listen to this most amazing example of "business as usual": a report from the Osservator Romano. One would have expected that with the revelation anew of the terrible depth to which our culture has descended, a culture raised in Christianity and in Christian concepts and categories, that the officials of the Church would bow their heads in shame and acknowledge their participation even if indirect, in the guilt for these crimes. If not an open confession, one might at the very least have expected a sense of humility. Instead, the Vatican's official newspaper had nothing better but in the same month of the trial to reveal that Titus, the Roman general who destroyed the Holy Temple and ravaged Jerusalem in the year 70, felt that the Jews deserved their punishment, and that he was the instrument for their destruction. "The Jewish people were so obviously struck by Divine punishment that it would indeed have been an impious action to spare them from destruction." To which "Osservatore Romano" adds wisely and sagely that they know what the sin of all Jews was: the rejection of the Christian witness and faith. At the very time that official Christianity should recognize their share in the responsibility for the horror and the shame of the twentieth century, they re-warm and re-hash the old theological nonsense which has caused so much anguish in the world, which has stained so many pages of history with innocent Jewish blood! The same horses, the same donkeys, the same tents-but there is no human man, the voice of humanity is lacking in the Vatican.

At a time of this sort, when sensationalist magazines are bored and when pious journals are snickering, the State of Israel has a sacred historic duty to recognize that yom besorah hu, v'anu mach'shim, that it has an urgent message to tell the world and that it dare not draw a curtain of silence over itself; that no matter how unwilling the world is to listen, it must drill it in again and again like the proverbial drop of water which ultimately forms a hole in the rock. It must remind the world of ish, of humaneness. Throughout Jewish history, we have been the ones to wake up the world to the message of humanity. From the time of Moses of whom it is said va-yiffen koh va-koh va-yar ki ein ish--that he looked hither and yon and saw that there was no man--and therefore he became the man to execute justice and righteousness--until the time of the rabbis of the Mishnah who proclaimed that be'makom she-ein ish, hishtadel li-heyot ish, in a place where there is no man, you must become that man, Jews have recognized that where others are remiss in their humaneness we shall assert ours. How appropriate a task for the State of Israel which this week celebrated its thirteenth birthday. Thirteen years is the time when traditionally a young lad becomes an ish--a man. On this bar mitzvah year of the State of Israel, it too must proclaim for the world the message of ish.

The second lesson to emerge from this historic trial is that without G-d, without Torah, without an ideal higher than man himself, man can be reduced to a very clever robot who will kill and murder efficiently as part of "obedience." He will be able to sit behind the desk, and with complete politeness to secretaries and underlings and callers, as part of his "orders" and "discipline," calmly press a button which will seal the doom of thousands and millions of his fellow men. In other words, it has revealed to us, to our new generation, that modern man has something rotten and mean in his soul, that he is the kind of being who can allow "business as usual" in utter disregard of the sanctity of ish, and without ever listening to kol adam.

We Orthodox Jews in a world of this sort, have a historic responsibility. We must break out of the bonds of our usual discord and wake up our fellow Jews and through them the world. We must educate--first our own Jews, and afterwards all others--that unless the Divine Image fills the human form, then man is better off dead than alive. We must teach all humanity that if you take the word ish, man, and remove the middle letter, yud--which stands for G-d--what you have left is: esh--a consuming fire, whether it be the powerful fire of the crematorium or the cataclysmic fire of the nuclear bomb. Through every available means, through school and through paper, through journal and through speech, through friendship and through example, we must teach the Torah way of life, which in practice for Jews and in its ideals for all people, can alone bring back to man a sense of dignity which comes from the Tzellem Elohim, the Divine Image in which he was created. Yom besorah hu, v'anu mach'shim. We must teach our fellow Jews both the grandeur of our own heritage and also the danger of a secularized, G-dless culture. We must tell them that if they want to assimilate, let them first know the kind of world into which they are assimilating: a sick, sick culture, the very cradle in which Nazism was nursed and weaned. For men who truly believed in G-d could never let "orders" by mere creatures transcend such very basic and fundamental religious principles as "Thou shalt not murder." A misguided religious bigot will kill individuals in a rage of passion. But cold, white collar, wholesale murder with scientific efficiency is possible only in secular society in which G-dlessness has allowed science to develop into deadly channels.

There is a nega, a plague, in the soul of modern man, man whose sus and chamor and ohalim are cared for, but whose heart is in disarray, whose spirit is in chaos, whose soul suffers from sickening cynicism, whose core of ish has been obliterated, who is like the ghost of city: only a ghost of a man. And our Sidra tells us the one effective procedure for him who suffers a nega, and that is: ve'huva el ha-kohen--he shall be brought to the priest. We must bring suffering man back to Torah, back to G-d, back to a sense of the sacred. For the nega of our times is a disease of the soul and a plague of the spirit.

If the State of Israel is to serve its historic destiny, then it must assume the role of ish. On the years of its bar mitzvah, it must attempt to achieve religious maturity. Diplomacy, military marches on Independence Day, all this is good and well; but this is not the essence of the destiny of Israel. Israel must now rise to its full historic stature and benign to fulfill the religious role which destiny gave it. There is no doubt that religiously speaking, Israel has made mistakes in the past; only one who is blind will deny that. But, like the proud father of his bar mitzvah son we recite over Israel the Barukh she-petarani--blessed is G-d who has let us survive those years of immaturity and weakness and mistakes. We now turn to the future, a future which Israel must return to its sacred origins.

The good wishes go out from the hearts of all Jews to the State of Israel. Like the young lad who, as his first mitzvah, learns to lay his tefillin, so do we wish Israel the blessings of tefillin. Just as the tefillin consists of two parts, the shel yad (the part that is wound on the hands) and the shel rosh (the part that is wound on the head), so do we hope that Israel will be strong in hand and

dedication of mind and soul to Almighty G-d will be its religious greatness. In its dual capacity as a strong and peaceful nation and as a holy and noble people, may the State of Israel relay its message to all the world, that the G-d who dwells in its midst has given every man the Divine Image, and that every human being must assert the ish within him and articulare the kol adam, the voice of humanity which G-d granted him. For today is a yom besorah, a day of proclamation of this great message, on this day we shall not be silent.

And in return, in the words of the Grace, ha-rachaman yevasser lanu besurot tovot, yeshuot ve'nachmot- the all merciful G-d will proclaim to us good tidings, tidings of salvation and consolation. Amen.

[CS – Friday night we will count 20 days of the Omer 2 weeks and 6 days.]

[CS – additional post

RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack

Lashon Hara and Yom HaAtzmaut

RIETS Kollel Elyon

Apr 30, 2025

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Lashon Hara, the subtext of this week's Torah reading of Tazria-Metzora, is a well-known and frequently emphasized concept in Judaism, and yet is a challenging one to understand. It is commonly taught (based on the writings of Maimonides and of the Chafetz Chaim) that Lashon Hara refers specifically to disparaging remarks that are true, in contrast with motzei shem ra, which is slander. However, if that is the case, it is difficult to understand why it is prohibited. What is wrong with telling the truth, if indeed that's what it is? Even if it leads to negative results for the subject, wouldn't they be appropriate and deserved?

There are many elements to draw upon to explain this, beginning with the postulate that the distinction between lashon hara and motzei shem ra is somewhat overstated. Lashon Hara may be factual in some sense, but that does not mean it is actually true, whether in its content or in the impact that it brings about.

The content may be misleading, or flatly wrong, for countless reasons that don't involve overt lying, including subjectivity, partial truth, faulty memories, and the myriad cognitive biases to which mortals are vulnerable.

Further, the impact can be false, in numerous other ways. The consequences are often disproportionate- and sometimes knowingly so. Often a sliver of negative truth will be seized as a pretext to justify mistreatment of the subject, a falsity and injustice in practice.

It is not only the subject that suffers from disproportionate negativity; society as a whole does as well. It is vitally important that a belief exists in the general decency and moral behavior of the average citizen; without that, the people live down to the perception of what they think the baseline is, a phenomenon detailed in Timothy Wilson's book "Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change".

In fact, R. Yehoshua Leib Diskin understood that this is the reasoning behind the imperative to judge others favorably. Rather than a service extended to those others, he posits, it is a necessity for the one judging: he will feel no motivation to maintain a standard of behavior if he doesn't believe there is one.

The destructive impact of such attitudes is on display in the contemporary trend to try to tear down (figuratively and literally, in the case of statues) heroes of American and European history. This has been extended even to figures such as Winston Churchill, an effort which Douglas Murray writes about in his book "The War on the West":

"If what Churchill did in his life doesn't count for anything, then it is hard to see how any human action counts for anything. If Churchill's good points cannot outweigh any bad points, then no one can ever do enough good in their lives. In other words, if we cannot get Churchill right, and get him in a proper perspective, then there seems little point in trying to do so with anyone else. Finally, there seems little point in trying to do anything good ourselves. The attacks on Churchill make all human endeavor seem futile, because if even defeating the greatest evil in history will count as nothing, and you will not be lauded for it in your own country even half a century after your death, then what good deed could ever count for anything?"

The damage wrought by both types of unfair impact are on full display through the treatment too often directed at the State of Israel. It is no coincidence that Israel is also the subject of its own prohibition of disparagement, dibat ha-aretz, the sin of The Spies.

No human being is perfect; Israel, however, is the only nation that it is expected to be perfect so as to be entitled to exist. Any flaw, real or imagined, is invoked to justify vilification not leveled at Earth's most despotic regimes.

Quite the contrary; in many circles, the most evil actors on the planet are held in higher regard. This complete moral absurdity is a natural result of the distorted lens directed at Israel: if the noble achievements and aspirations of this nation of heroism and benevolence can be dismissed, what moral standard can exist for humanity?

Yom HaAtzmaut is a time to acknowledge God's miraculous gifts of the past century; it is also a time to recall His charge of many centuries ago, when he chose Abraham to bear his message of "charity and justice" through his descendants, and promised him a Land from which to broadcast that message. The fact that, through His grace, human beings can once again bring their best efforts and intentions towards manifesting modern miracles on behalf of all of humanity is a cause for celebration. The stars in the sky are only seen in darkness, but are there all the time; the blue star against the white background shines as bright, even for those who can't see it.]

[**CS Additional post:**

Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

Thu, May 1, 2025 at 10:11 PM

BS"D Note that Yom Ha'Atzmaut is 5 Iyar, which would be Shabbat -- but moved forward to Thursday (May 1) this year to avoid any activities celebrating the holiday on Shabbat.

"My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully." – beginning of meditation at the end of the Amidah prayer.

Tazria and Metzora bring us almost to the very middle of the Torah. (The middle is in Acharei Mot, which we read next week.) In the weeks after Shemini, when Nadav and Avihu die because they bring and burn a "strange fire" by the Mishkan, the Torah presents the conditions that make a person tamei (ritually impure) or tahor (ritually pure). Only a Jew who is tahor may approach Hashem's presence, which resides above the Ark in the Mishkan. Because of the danger of approaching Hashem's presence, the Torah presents the rules of ritual purity and impurity in great detail.

Tazria and Metzora discuss tzaraat – afflictions on a person's skin (or clothes or walls of a home), causes of these impurities, and their cures. While a common English translation of tzaraat is "leprosy," the English term is very misleading. According to the Internet, leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is a chronic bacterial infection caused by Mycobacterium leprae that primarily affect the skin, peripheral nerves, upper respiratory tract, and eyes. Tzaraat is not a disease, not bacterial, and does not spread through direct contact with another person who has the disease. Tzaraat, instead, is a sign that a person suffers from a spiritual disorder, must consult with a Kohen (not a physician), isolate, figure out his or her spiritual lackings, and perform teshuvah. While the classic cause of tzaraat is "lashon horah," or evil speech (such as slander), hautiness is also an also important spiritual lacking associated with tzaraat. A person with tzaraat is called a "metzora." Tzaraat may also afflict a person's clothes or the walls of his home. Stinginess is a classic cause of tzaraat on the walls of a person's home.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine explains that tzaraat is a gift of love from Hashem, a sign that a person has some significant spiritual shortcoming and must perform teshuvah. Hashem's gift is alerting a person to his spiritual shortcoming so he can reflect, understand his social shortcomings, and perform teshuvah. Once a metzora performs teshuvah and a Kohen validates his cure, the metzora undergoes a prescribed ritual and returns to society. Hashem's gift is informing the metzora of his spiritual problem and prescribing a path to full recovery. Neither the diagnosis nor the cure involves a physician or any medical intervention.

Rabbi David Fohrman explains that the ritual required for a cured metzora to return to society is very similar to the ritual of Korban Pesach. Both rituals involve two live clean birds, blood, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop. Tzaraat gives the appearance of dead skin

on part of a person's body. Recovery from tzaraat is similar to recovering from a partial death or near death situation (as Aharon describes Miriam's appearance when she has tzaraat). The Korban Pesach comes right after B'Nai Yisrael survive the tenth plague – killing of the first born of Egypt. After the Korban Pesach, and after the ritual of a recovered metzora, the Jews involved join or rejoin B'Nai Yisrael. The individual who may have been isolated rejoins his communal part and connects to the Jewish people.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander brings the Haftorah, about metzorim who save the Jews of Israel (northern kinigdom) from starvation, to the present. We encounter many instances in Jewish history when God selects people of uncertain holiness to be His instruments of saving the Jewish people. The Haftorah focuses on Gehazi, Elisha's assistant who embarrassed the prophet by asking Na'aman, the Aramean general, for a tribute after Elisha cured his tzaraat. (Elisha had refused to accept any payment.) God punishes Gehazi by giving him and his three sons tzaraat for the rest of their lives. Gehazi and his sons are outside city walls because of their tzaraat. When they are near death from starvation and thirst, they go into the Aramean camp – and discover that the Arameans have abandoned their camps and left their food, water, and wealth. The metzorim eat, drink, and then go to the city to tell the Jews that it is safe to enter the Aramean camp for food and water. The man who sinned against Elisha saves the Jews from the Aramean siege. We find similar incidents in Jewish history. For example, Cyrus, a pagan ruler, sends Jews back from Persia to Jerusalem to help rebuild the second temple. Five hundred years later, Herod, a particularly sinful Roman, initiates a huge project to transform the poorly built second Temple into a magnificent structure.

Rabbi Brander observes that the early Zionists in Israel are primarily secular Jews. Throughout much of the history of Israel in the past 77 years, the secular Jews have done most of the fighting and absorbed most of the injuries and deaths. In the past 18 months, since October 7, 2023, religious Jews have greatly increased their participation in the fighting and absorbed much greater losses compared to earlier in Israeli history. (The percentage of Haredi Jews involved in the fighting, however, remains much lower than the percentages for other parts of Israeli society.) During the week that includes Yom HaZickron and Yom Ha'atzmaut, Rabbi Brander reminds us that we must appreciate the contributions from all parts of the Israeli society.

Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah and 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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom Hannah & Alan]

Home Weekly Parsha Tazria-Metzora
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's double parsha presents to us a difficult set of rituals regarding a type of physical disease that evinced physical manifestations. The rabbis associated this disease with the sin of improper speech and personal slander. We no longer have any true knowledge of the disease, its true appearances and effects, its quarantine period and the healing process that restored the person to one's community and society. The ritual laws of purity and impurity are no longer applicable in our post-Temple society and since there are no comments on these laws in a specific manner in the Babylonian Talmud these ritual laws are not subject to the usual intensive scholarship and study that pertain, for instance, to the laws of money and torts in the Talmud.

In the nineteenth century a great Chasidic rebbe and scholar composed a "Talmud" regarding the laws of purity and impurity. This feat of scholarship met with criticism from other scholars and has remained controversial and relatively ignored in the modern yeshiva and scholarly world. In effect the entire topic of this week's double parsha remains mysterious and unclear to us. After all the attempted explanations and reasons for these ritual laws of purity and impurity, they remain mysterious and relatively inexplicable to us. Especially when these two parshiyot occur together, as they do this year, and in most years, the question of their relevance becomes even more acute and perplexing. The Torah which always challenges us to understand it retains its inscrutability.

Perhaps this is the message of the Torah itself to us. There is a world that is beyond our earthly eyes and rational vision. Modern man always dreams about space aliens and different universes than the one we inhabit. There is an almost innate sense in us that there is more to creation than what we sense and feel. It fuels our individual drive to immortality, our dreams and imaginations, and it allows us to imagine and invent. There is a popular belief that necessity is the mother of invention. But in reality, I do not feel that this is accurate.

Imagination is the mother of invention. There was no real necessity for the unbelievable advances in technology that our past century has witnessed. But people lived in a world beyond our present real world and imagined the computer, the wireless phone and the internet. This capacity of human imagination and being able to deal with an unseen world that truly exists is one of the great traits of the human mind. The Torah indicates to us the existence of such a world, a world of purity and impurity, a special world of holiness and of the human quest for attachment to the Creator of all worlds.

Even though we do not quite relate to that world with our finite mentality, the Torah wishes us to realize that such a world does exist beyond our limited human vision. And that is a very important and essential lesson in life.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
Holiness and Childbirth
Tazria, Metzora

The sidrot of Tazria and Metzora contain laws which are among the most difficult to understand. They are about conditions of "impurity" arising from the fact that we are physical beings, embodied souls, and hence exposed to (in Hamlet's words) "the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to."

Though we have immortal longings, mortality is the condition of human existence, as it is of all embodied life.

Rambam explains:

We have already shown that, in accordance with the Divine wisdom, genesis can only take place through destruction, and without the destruction of the individual members of the species, the species themselves would not exist permanently... He who thinks that he can have flesh and bones without being subject to any external influence, or any of the accidents of matter, unconsciously wishes to reconcile two opposites, namely, to be at the same time subject and not subject to change.

Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, III:12

Throughout history there have been two distinct and opposing ways of relating to this fact: hedonism (living for physical pleasure) and asceticism (relinquishing physical pleasure). The former worships the

physical while denying the spiritual, the latter enthrones the spiritual at the cost of the physical.

The Jewish way has always been different: to sanctify the physical – eating, drinking, sex and rest – making the life of the body a vehicle for the Divine Presence. The reason is simple. We believe with perfect faith that the God of redemption is also the God of creation. The physical world we inhabit is the one God made and pronounced "very good." To be a hedonist is to deny God. To be an ascetic is to deny the goodness of God's world. To be a Jew is to celebrate both creation and Creator. That is the principle that explains many otherwise incomprehensible features of Jewish life.

The laws with which the Parsha begins are striking examples of this:

When a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be teme'ah for seven days, just as she is during the time of separation when she has her period... Then, for thirty-three additional days she shall have a waiting period during which her blood is ritually clean. Until this purification period is complete, she shall not touch anything holy and shall not enter the Sanctuary.

If she gives birth to a girl, she shall have for two weeks the same teme'ah status as during her menstrual period. Then, for sixty-six days after that, she shall have a waiting period during which her blood is ritually clean.

She then brings a burnt-offering and a sin-offering, after which she is restored to "ritual purity." What is the meaning of these laws? Why does childbirth render the mother teme'ah (usually translated as "ritually impure", better understood as "a condition which impedes or exempts from a direct encounter with holiness")? And why is the period after giving birth to a girl twice that for a boy?

There is a temptation to see these laws as inherently beyond the reach of human understanding. Several rabbinic statements seem to say just this. In fact, it is not so, as Maimonides explains at length in the Guide. To be sure, we can never know – specifically with respect to laws that have to do with kedushah (holiness) and teharah (purity) – whether our understanding is correct. But we are not thereby forced to abandon our search for understanding, even though any explanation will be at best speculative and tentative.

The first principle essential to understanding the laws of ritual purity and impurity is that God is life. Judaism is a profound rejection of cults, ancient and modern, that glorify death. The great pyramids of Egypt were grandiose tombs. Arthur Koestler noted that without death "the cathedrals collapse, the pyramids vanish into the sand, the great organs become silent." The English metaphysical poets turned to it constantly as a theme. As T. S. Eliot wrote:

Webster was much possessed by death
And saw the skull beneath the skin . . .
Donne, I suppose, was such another . . .
He knew the anguish of the marrow
The ague of the skeleton . . .
Whispers of Immortality, T. S. Eliot

Freud coined the word thanatos to describe the death-directed character of human life. Judaism is a protest against death-centred cultures. "It is not the dead who praise the Lord, nor those who go down into silence" (Psalm 114) "What profit is there in my death, if I go down into the pit? Can the dust acknowledge You? Can it proclaim your truth?" (Psalm 30). As we open a Sefer Torah we say: "All of you who hold fast to the Lord your God are alive today" (Deut 4:4). The Torah is a tree of life. God is the God of life. As Moses put it in two memorable words: "Choose life" (Deut. 30:19).

It follows that kedushah (holiness) – a point in time or space where we stand in the unmediated presence of God – involves a supreme consciousness of life. That is why the paradigm case of tumah is contact with a corpse. Other cases of tumah include diseases or bodily emissions that remind us of our mortality. God's domain is life. Therefore it may not be associated in any way with intimations of death.

This is how Judah Halevi explains the purity laws:

A dead body represents the highest degree of loss of life, and a leprous limb is as if it were dead. It is the same with the loss of seed, because it had been endowed with living power, capable of engendering a human being. Its loss therefore forms a contrast to the living and breathing.

The Kuzari, II:60

The laws of purity apply exclusively to Israel, argues Halevi, precisely because Judaism is the supreme religion of life, and its adherents are therefore hyper-sensitive to even the most subtle distinctions between life and death.

A second principle, equally striking, is the acute sensitivity Judaism shows to the birth of a child. Nothing is more "natural" than procreation. Every living thing engages in it. Sociobiologists go so far as to argue that a human being is a gene's way of creating another gene. By contrast, the Torah goes to great lengths to describe how many of the heroines of the Bible – among them Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah and the Shunamite woman – were infertile and had children only through a miracle.

Clearly the Torah intends a message here, and it is unmistakable. To be a Jew is to know that survival is not a matter of biology alone. What other cultures may take as natural is for us a miracle. Every Jewish child is a gift of God. No faith has taken children more seriously or devoted more of its efforts to raising the next generation. Childbirth is wondrous. To be a parent is the closest any of us come to God himself. That, incidentally, is why women are closer to God than men, because they, unlike men, know what it is to bring new life out of themselves, as God brings life out of himself. The idea is beautifully captured in the verse in which, leaving Eden, Adam turns to his wife and calls her Chava "for she is the mother of all life."

We can now speculate about the laws relating to childbirth. When a mother gives birth, she undergoes great risk. Throughout the centuries, childbirth has been a life-threatening danger to mother and baby alike, and even today there are ever-present risks for many. Furthermore, during the process of childbirth, a woman is separated from what until now had been part of her own body (a foetus, said the rabbis, "is like a limb of the mother") and which has now become an independent person. If that is so in the case of a boy, it is doubly so in the case of a girl – who, with God's help, will not merely live but may herself in later years become a source of new life. At one level, therefore, the laws signal the detachment of life from life.

At another level, they surely suggest something more profound. There is a halachic principle: "One who is engaged in a mitzvah is exempt from other mitzvot." It is as if God were saying to the mother: for forty days in the case of a boy, and doubly so in the case of a girl (the mother-daughter bond is ontologically stronger than that between mother and son): I exempt you from coming before Me in the place of holiness because you are fully engaged in one of the holiest acts of all, nurturing and caring for your child. Unlike others you do not need to visit the Temple to be attached to life in all its sacred splendour. You are experiencing it yourself, directly and with every fibre of your being. Days, weeks, from now you will come and give thanks before Me (together with offerings for having come through a moment of danger). But for now, look upon your child with wonder. For you have been given a glimpse of the great secret, otherwise known only to God.

Childbirth exempts the new mother from attendance at the Temple because her bedside replicates the experience of the Temple. She now knows what it is for love to beget life, and, in the midst of mortality, to be touched by an intimation of immortality.

Parshat Tazria Metzora: Love, Marriage and Continuity

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"If a woman has conceived seed and born a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days; as in the days of her menstrual sickness shall she be unclean. On the eighth day [the child's] foreskin shall be circumcised. For thirty-three additional days, she shall sit on blood of purity…." (Leviticus 12:2–4)

The Torah reading of Tazria is difficult because of its subject matter: the ritual status of a woman after she gives birth in terms of the times when she is ritually impure and when she is ritually pure, as well as the ritual

impurity which devolves upon both men and women when semen or blood emerges from their bodies. The reading is further complicated by the very strange order of the verses and the chapters.

The first question arises from a verse which seemingly has no connection with what precedes or follows it: after the Bible has informed us that when a woman bears a male child she will be ritually impure for seven days (Lev. 12:1, 2), the following verse does not deal with the subsequent thirty-three days of ritual purity which she is allowed to enjoy no matter what her physical state may be – that comes two verses later (Lev. 12:4) – but rather the Bible informs us "That on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (Lev. 12:3). Why have the law of circumcision in the very midst of the laws of a woman's status of purity upon her giving birth? It hardly seems to belong!

The second question deals with the order of the chapters. Chapter twelve deals with ritual purity and impurity as a result of childbirth, as we have seen. Chapter fifteen deals with the different kinds of seminal emissions which emerge from a male and the different kinds of blood emissions which emerge from a female; emissions which are also connected to reproduction as a result of a sexual act between the couple. In the midst of these two biblical discussions, which certainly involve ritual impurity and impurity surrounding reproduction, come two chapters – chapters thirteen and fourteen – which deal with tzara'at, usually translated as leprosy but which certainly refers to a discoloration and degeneration of the skin, which causes the individual to look like a walking corpse. Why bring tzara'at in the midst of a discussion on reproduction?

In Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's important work entitled Family Redeemed, my revered teacher interprets the opening chapters of Genesis as a crucial lesson to humanity concerning the spiritual potential as well as the destructive danger of the sexual act. Indeed, the classical commentator Rashi understands the fruit of knowledge of good and evil as having injected within human nature libido, eroticism and lust, rather than the expression of love and the reproductive powers which were initially embedded in human nature. Sigmund Freud sees the serpent as a phallic symbol, and eating is often found in the Bible as a metaphor for engaging in sex. From this perspective, the sin of having partaken of the forbidden fruit is the sin of sexual lust, which can often separate sex from the sacred institution of matrimony, a natural expression of affection between two individuals who are committed to a shared life and to the establishment of a family.

It is fascinating that the punishments for having eaten the fruit are related to reproduction: "And to the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain and travail in pregnancy and with pain shall you bring forth children….'" (Genesis 3:16).

Even more to the point, the most fundamental penalty for having tasted of the forbidden fruit is death, which plagues men and woman alike: "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat; for on the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17).

The sexual act was meant to give not only unity and joy to the couple but also to bestow continued life through the gift of reproduction. Tragically the misuse of sex and its disengagement from love, marriage and family can lead to death-inducing diseases.

I would argue that this is precisely why tzara'at, or the living death which it symbolizes, appears in the Bible in the midst of its discussion of reproduction and the normative processes of seminal emissions and menstrual blood, which are necessary by-products of the glory of reproduction. Tragically the life-force which is granted by God through the sexual organs can often degenerate into decay and death when those very sexual organs are misused.

I will also submit that this is precisely why the commandment of circumcision comes right before the biblical establishment of a large number of days of purity (thirty-three after the birth of a male and sixty-six after the birth of a female), no matter what blood may emerge from the woman's body. The much larger number of days of purity attest to the great miracle of childbirth – which is always a heartbeat away from death for every anxious parent until the healthy baby emerges and emits its first cry (and this accounts for the initial days of ritual impurity), but which results in new life and the continuation of the family line, giving the greatest degree of satisfaction that a human being can ever experience. Such glories of reproduction are only possible if the male will learn to limit his sexual activity to within the institution of marriage and will recognize the sanctity of sex as well as its pleasures. Placing the divine mark upon the male sexual organ with the performance of the commandment of circumcision establishes this ideal of sanctity. The sacredness of the woman's body is similarly expressed when she immerses herself in a mikveh prior to resuming sexual relations with her husband each month and even makes a blessing to God while still unclothed within the ritual waters, which symbolize life and birth and future.

Hence, the most meaningful blessing which I know is intoned during the marriage ceremony: "Blessed are You O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sanctifies his nation Israel by means of the nuptial canopy and the sanctity of marriage."

Shabbat Shalom

The Thirteen Midos of Rabbi Yishmael

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Reasoning

Can we restore a lost mesorah on the basis of logic?

Question #2: Kal vachomer

If an opening is large enough for a football tackle to rush through unimpeded, shouldn't a healthy ten-year-old be able to walk through it?

Question #3: Gezeirah shavah

What is meant that something is an "equal decree"?

Foreword:

Immediately prior to the kaddish derabbanan recited at the end of the korbanos section of our davening, we recite a beraisa in which we enumerate the thirteen "midos" of Rabbi Yishmael, a listing of methods whereby the laws of the Torah shebe'al peh are derived from the written Torah. This beraisa is the beginning of the introduction to the Sifra (also called the Toras Kohanim), the halachic midrash of the book of Vayikra.

The goal of this article is to explain the beraisa of Rabbi Yishmael, but I must first explain what halachic midrash is. Halachic midrash is the method whereby the laws of the Torah shebe'al peh can be derived from the Written Torah. When Moshe Rabbeinu spent forty days on Har Sinai, Hashem taught him all the laws of the Oral Torah. Moshe then taught these laws to the Bnei Yisrael in a method that is described in the Gemara (Eruvin 54b) such that each adult male Jew would hear the laws four different times. Each person kept his own private notes to help him remember the laws of the Torah shebe'al peh.

The system was not perfect. When Moshe Rabbeinu passed on, the Jewish people realized collectively that they could not recall clearly thousands of laws that Moshe had taught them. The Gemara teaches that Asniel ben Kenaz was able to restore these laws to the collective memory by figuring them out bepilpulo, by use of dialectic reasoning.

To quote the passage of Gemara (Temurah 16a):

Immediately prior to his passing on to Gan Eden, Moshe Rabbeinu said to Yehoshua,

"Ask of me every doubt that you have!" Yehoshua answered, "Rebbe, have I left you for a moment and gone somewhere else? Did you not write about me that 'his assistant, Yehoshua bin Nun, never left the ohel mo'eid'" (Shemos 33:11)? At that moment, Yehoshua weakened (as a punishment for the lack of humility implicit in his answer [Maharsha; cf. Rashi]): he forgot three hundred halachos and also now had seven hundred uncertainties (which were discovered after Moshe passed away). The entire people of Israel rose up against Yehoshua, planning to kill him... The beraisa taught: seventeen hundred cases of kal vachomer, gezeirah shavah, and derived halachic details were forgotten during the mourning period for Moshe. Rabbi Avahu responded that they were "retrieved by Asniel ben Kenaz with his dialectic reasoning."

Thus, the opening question to our article: "How can we restore a lost mesorah on the basis of logic?"

The answer is that, alongside the Torah shebe'al peh and the written Torah, there is a mesorah of rules whereby the laws of the Torah

shebe'al peh are derived from the written Torah. These laws were all part of the original Oral Torah, as were the rules, which provide a backup whereby the laws may be retrieved should they be forgotten.

The rules for deriving the laws fall into two categories:

Extra words -- yalfusa

1. Some halachos are derived on the basis of extra words or parts of words in the Torah. An example of this is that, when the Torah provides lengthy instructions for offering the various korbanos each day of Sukkos, a discerning reader will notice that the template reading of the different days is not identical. While the wine libations on these days are identical, the word used to describe those libations varies, twice with a מ added and once with a י added. These extra letters spell the word מים, water, whence we derive that, on Sukkos, there is a unique service called nisuch hamayaim, pouring of water on the mizbei'ach. This law is not mentioned anywhere else in the Written Torah, but is expounded upon in the Oral Torah, the Torah shebe'al peh.

Clearly understanding the pesukim of the Torah provides the sources for these halachos, and this is a common way that these laws are derived by the Gemara and by the halachic midrashim. Understanding the grammar as Chazal understood the pesukim of the Torah is an essential way towards deriving these laws. The absolute master in explaining these rules is the Malbim, in his work entitled Ayeles Hashachar, usually printed as an introduction to his commentary to Vayikra. The Malbim writes that he had originally planned to provide a thorough explanation of the halachic exegesis process as a running commentary to the Sifra. However, after writing the commentary to just two pesukim, he discovered that the results of this work would be the length of a multi-volume encyclopedia. As a result, he wrote instead an introductory work, Ayeles Hashachar, elucidating the grammatical principles whereby Chazal derived the words of the Torah as a source for the laws of Torah shebe'al peh. Throughout his commentary to Vayikra, the Malbim refers to the Ayeles Hashachar to explain how Chazal understood each pasuk and arrived at their conclusion.

Midos

2. Other halachos are derived on the basis of hermeneutic rules, called midos, that are methods whereby halachos not obviously mentioned in the written Torah are taught. In other words, these halachos were included in the Torah shebe'al peh, but, again, as a backup, they could also be derived on the basis of the rules of Torah shebe'al peh. The thirteen rules that we recite in our davening is Rabbi Yishmael's version of these rules. There are slight discrepancies or differences of opinion among tanna'im concerning some of the rules used to derive these laws, meaning that the details of how these rules work were occasionally disputed. That is why the midos are referred to as the thirteen rules of Rabbi Yishmael. This article will not address the disputes.

These are the thirteen rules that are mentioned in the beraisa of Rabbi Yishmael, as understood by the Ra'avad and most late commentators:

1. Kal vachomer
2. Gezeirah shavah
3. Binyan av
4. Klal ufrat
5. Prat uchlal
6. Klal ufrat uchlal
7. Klal shehu tzarich lefrat
8. Davar shehayah bichlal viyatza lelameid
9. Davar shehayah bichlal viyatza ke'inyano
10. Davar shehayah bichlal viyatza shelo ke'inyano
11. Davar shehayah bichlal viyatza bedavar chodosh
12. Davar halameid mei'inyano
13. Shnei kesuvim hamach'chishin.

Those familiar with the beraisa of Rabbi Yishmael will immediately note that I have omitted significant sections of the beraisa.

A. In some instances, the beraisa provides two variations of a rule, such as, it presents two types of binyan av. I will explain why there are two types, but they are both manifestations of the same hermeneutic principle.

B. Some of these rules are mentioned by the beraisa without any explanation as to how they work or what they mean. For example, four of the first five rules, kal vachomer, gezeira shavah, klal uprat and prat uchlal are not at all explained. On the other hand, the method of derivation of most of the other rules is mentioned in the beraisa, although they are never fully explained. Iy"H, I will be explaining these rules.

Frequency

We should also be aware that some of these rules have thousands of applications, whereas others of them appear very few times in all of Talmudic literature.

Kal vachomer

At this point, I will explain the first of Rabbi Yishmael's midos,which is perhaps the most obvious rule in terms of logic: the kal vachomer. Among the thirteen rules, this one is unique, because it actually appears several times in the Chumash itself as part of someone's logical argument. For example, to prove that they are innocent of stealing Yosef's goblet, the brothers rally a kal vachomer. "If we returned the money that we found in our sacks, how could we possibly have considered taking something that is not ours?" (Bereishis 44:8).

Very simply put, a kal vachomer means that if something is true in a more obvious situation, it should certainly hold true in a less obvious situation. A simple application is as follows: If a burly, 6' 10" football tackle weighing 350 pounds can race through a passageway unhindered, a 100-pound, 5' person with no ambulatory difficulties should certainly be able to enter via the same opening.

Ein onshin min hadin

There are a few instances in which a kal vachomer cannot teach a halacha. Although a kal vachomer can prove that something is prohibited, it cannot be used to establish punishment, a principle called ein onshin min hadin. When the Torah imposes a penalty or punishment for violating a law, we cannot derive by means of a kal vachomer that this penalty or punishment applies to a newly derived law.

Why not?

We find two different reasons why ein onshin min hadin. One is that, although the punishment described by the Torah may be appropriate for a lesser crime, someone violating a more serious infraction should perhaps be punished in a harsher way. In other words, kal vachomer can teach that if the Torah prohibited a lesser sin, it certainly prohibited a more serious infraction. However, the more serious crime might require a more severe punishment than what the Torah meted out for the lesser offense.

Another reason explains that ein onshin min hadin is based on possible human logical fallibility. In general, we are obligated to apply our G-d-given intelligence when studying mitzvos, and kal vachomer is an example of this. However, prior to meting out judgment on the basis of a kal vachomer, we must recognize that there might be a reason why what appears as a kal vachomer is actually not. According to this approach, the Torah's precept not to punish someone until and unless we are absolutely certain of his guilt requires that he not be punished on the basis of a kal vachomer.

These two approaches are not mutually exclusive; both factors might be true. We cannot punish someone on the basis of a kal vachomer because the kal vachomer itself may not be fully accurate; or the kal vachomer may be correct, and precisely because this act is a more serious crime its perpetrator should not be punished this way.

Dayo

There is another instance whereby someone might think he can apply a kal vachomer, but he cannot. This is referred to as a case of dayo laba min hadin li'heyos kanidon, which means that you cannot derive with a kal vachomer more than the original source teaches, regardless as to how compelling the kal vachomer might appear. The Sifra picks an example of this from a pasuk in Chumash. When Miriam complained to Aharon about Moshe's behavior regarding his wife Tziporah, Miriam was guilty of saying loshon hora at that moment and turned white as a metzora. The pasuk then states, "Had her father spat in her face, would she not not have been ashamed for seven days" (Bamidbar 12:14). The Sifra

completes the thought of the pasuk: for violating what Hashem has taught, she should be punished for fourteen days. Yet the Torah continues that her punishment is for seven days! Since the Torah concludes that she should be punished for no longer than she would have had her father censured her, any longer cannot be attributed to the kal vachomer.

Gezeirah shavah

The second principle of Rabbi Yishmael's list is gezeirah shavah, which is a legal analogy based on the use of the same term in two separate cases. To explain this, we first need to translate and explain the words. Most people familiar with the concept of gezeirah shavah are not aware of the origin of the term. The word gezeirah in this context means "word structure;" the word shavah means "similarity." Therefore, the term means "a similarity of words."

Here is an example of a gezeirah shavah: through the use of the same term regarding the mitzvos of eating matzoh on Seder night and on sitting in the sukkah on Sukkos we derive that, although on the rest of the seven days of Sukkos a person may avoid eating bread and other foods that require him to eat in the sukkah, on the first night of Sukkos he is, indeed, required to eat a meal in the sukkah.

Please note that the halacha requiring that we eat in the sukkah on the first night was taught as a mesorah from Sinai. The gezeirah shavah is a means for making certain that this law would not be forgotten.

At this point, we can answer another of our opening questions: What is meant that something is an "equal decree"?

The answer is that this is a complete mistranslation and misunderstanding of the words gezeirah shavah, just as a "helicopter mom" does not require a pilot's license. The word gezeirah shavah means "a similarity of words."

Same meaning

Those who are familiar with studying the concept of gezeirah shavah as it surfaces in the Gemara know that sometimes a gezeirah shavah is the exact same word, other times it is the same root, but not the exact same word, and at other times it can even be two words or terms that mean the same thing but are completely different words. One example of this last case is a gezeirah shavah that the Gemara derives from the words shav and ba in the laws of metzora (which is cited by Rashi on Chumash, Vayikra 14:39). Another example is where the words shachat and zavach are used as a gezeirah shavah (Chullin 85a). The two words both mean to slaughter.

There are many rules governing how a gezeirah shavah may be used to derive laws, depending on such issues as whether the word is repeated in both instances of its application, the exact word is used in both places, and are there other places in which a more obvious comparison may exist. We will not study these differences in our article.

Most people do not realize how many gezeiros shavos actually exist. I am in possession of a lengthy manuscript that explains many of the usages and rules applying to gezeirah shavah, and includes an extensive list of every case of gezeirah shavah that its author identified -- over four hundred instances of gezeirah shavah and thousands of applications.

Gezeirah shavah is unlike any of the other thirteen midos in one very important way: regarding every other midah, a general mesorah exists to use the midah to derive halachos. Gezeirah shavah, on the other hand, requires that there is also a mesorah via Moshe at Har Sinai that the specific words are a gezeirah shavah. Otherwise, ein adam dan gezeirah shavah mei'atzmo, someone cannot declare that certain terms or words are a gezeirah shavah on the basis of his own personal authority.

Exception

Based on a passage of Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesachim 6:1), we know that there is one exception to this rule. The Yerushalmi notes that, in an instance when we have a mesorah from an earlier source that a specific law is true, but we no longer know the hermeneutic origin for this law, someone may suggest a comparable word association, a gezeirah shavah that might be the hermeneutic source for this law.

However, in this instance, we cannot derive any new rulings with the gezeirah shavah. All we can do is suggest that perhaps the hermeneutic source of this law is the gezeirah shavah. (According to many rishonim, including Rashi, a similar concept exists relative to Halacha leMoshe miSinai. When we know that a halacha is true, but we are unaware that it has a hermeneutic source, we can suggest that its origin is a Halacha leMoshe miSinai [see Rashi, Bava Kama 3b].)

Be'ezras Hashem, we will continue this topic of analyzing the thirteen midos taught by Rabbi Yishmael in a future week.

Conclusion

When the Gemara teaches that the teachings of the rabbonim are dearer to Hashem than the laws of the Torah, it certainly includes the vast halachic literature devoted to understanding the thirteen midos. The Gemara expresses this notion by saying that what is derived from a drasha is more cherished even than the Written Torah (Yevamos 2b; 3a; see also Ritva and Aruch Laneir, Makkos 13a; Maharam Lublin, Bava Kamma 17b). To quote Rav Chaggai in the name of Rav Shmuel bar Nachman: "The Torah refers to that which is taught in the Oral Torah and that which is taught in the Written Torah, yet we do not know which is more cherished. When the pasuk states, 'according to these words I sealed the treaty with you and with Yisrael' (Yirmiyahu 33:25), this teaches us that the Oral Torah is more dear" (Yerushalmi, Peah 2:4).

Rav Kook Torah

Yom Ha'Atzma'ut: Rav Kook and Zionism

During controversy over the Hetter Mechirah in 1910, Rabbi Yaakov David Wilovsky (the "Ridbaz") of Safed leveled a serious accusation. He accused Rav Kook of abandoning his religious beliefs and becoming a Zionist in his old age. (In fact, from a very early age Rav Kook was imbued with a great love for Eretz Yisrael.)

For an Orthodox rabbi to support a secular movement that publicly proclaimed that it "has nothing to do with theology" was close to heresy. Why should a religious scholar with a deep love for all peoples be supportive of a secular nationalist movement? Indeed, Rav Kook's outlook on Zionism is a complex topic, the subject of numerous books and academic articles, and certainly beyond the scope of a brief essay. Nonetheless, the following excerpts from his writings and letters shed light on his views on this nonreligious (and sometimes anti-religious) movement.

Historical Precedents

Rav Kook noted that our generation is not the first to experience a return to the land of Israel comprised primarily of Jews lax in religious observance. When Ezra led the return to Eretz Yisrael in the beginning of the Second Temple Period, many of the Jewish pioneers who joined him were Sabbath-desecrators and worse; and yet this period witnessed the rebuilding of the Temple and tremendous advances in Torah scholarship.

Centuries later, during the corrupt reign of Herod, the nation suffered from a cruel king, far removed from the ideal Jewish leader. The irony of the holy Temple built by Herod, a brutal and paranoid despot, is even greater than the current phenomenon of the Holy Land being resettled by secular pioneers. The actual construction, Rav Kook wrote, "may be carried by those who fail to penetrate the profound secrets of the righteous. And not just the stonemasons; they may even be the ones orchestrating the construction." Yet this does not sully the innate purity of the lofty objective.

The Positive Influence of Eretz Yisrael

Rav Kook suggested that we need not be overly concerned about the religious level of the pioneers, since the Land on its own will determine who is deserving of living in it.

"There is no need to check the level of kashrut of those who come, for the Land will vomit out the true chaff; and "all those remaining shall be called holy" (Isaiah 4:3). This is similar to how we do not separate food from its waste elements before we eat it, but leave this [separation] process to life's natural functions."

Furthermore, the merit of Eretz Yisrael helps even the unworthy:

"The merit of the Land even protects the wicked. Even a gentile maidservant in the land of Israel is promised a portion in the World to Come (Ketubot 111a). Clearly the Talmud is not speaking of a righteous maidservant, who would anyway merit the World to Come... Rather it is

referring to an ordinary maidservant, with sordid deeds and coarse traits. Nonetheless, the merit of living in the land of Israel enables her to gain a portion in the World to Come....

"All the more so [regarding the secular Zionists, since] one may find in every Jew, even the most unworthy, precious gems of good deeds and positive traits. Certainly the land of Israel helps elevate and sanctify them. And if this is not evident in them, it will become so in their descendants."

Sacred Roots

Despite the current secular nature of Zionism, the return to Eretz Yisrael in recent times was first promoted by great tzaddikim — starting with the disciples of the Gaon of Vilna and the Baal Shem Tov — and Zionism derives its spiritual nourishment from these holy roots.

"[It was] the lofty righteous of previous generations who ignited a holy inner fire, a burning love for the holiness of Eretz Yisrael in the hearts of God's people. Due to their efforts, individuals gathered in the desolate land, until significant areas became a garden of Eden, and a large and important community of the entire people of Israel has settled in our holy land....

"Recently, however, the pious and great scholars have gradually abandoned the enterprise of settling the Holy Land.... This holy work has been appropriated by those lacking in [Torah] knowledge and good deeds.... Nonetheless, we see that the [secularists'] dedication in deed and action is nourished from the initial efforts of true tzaddikim, who kindled the holy desire to rebuild the Holy Land and return our exiles there."

Breaking of the Vessels

For Rav Kook, the fall of Zionism into the hands of the secularists was a form of shevirat keilim, reminiscent of the Kabbalistic "breaking of vessels" that occurred when the universe was created. The original light and holiness was simply too great to be contained within the limitations of the physical vessels; and it is our task to return these fallen sparks to their elevated source.

But why did the return to the land of Israel need to be appropriated by a secular nationalist movement? Rav Kook attempted to solve this riddle by noting certain qualities lacking in religious circles:

"The fundamental moral force hidden in [the Zionist movement] ... is its motto, "the entire nation." This nationalism proclaims... that it seeks to redeem the entire Jewish people. It does not concern itself with individuals or parties or sectors.... And with this perspective, it reaches out to the land of Israel and the love of Zion with a remarkable bravery and courage.

"It is clear that we cannot confront this adversary if we lack the same noble sense of responsibility that speaks in the name of the entire nation, all of Israel. We may not distinguish and divide. We may not say, "This one is one of ours so we will take care of him, but not that one." ... [We must] care in our hearts and souls for the good of the entire nation and its redemption, in the most inclusive way possible."

Additionally, Rav Kook explained that the pre-Messianic era requires a more practical, down-to-earth orientation, so that the Jewish people may return to their land as a healthy, balanced nation, after centuries of detached statelessness in exile.

"We have a tradition [see Sotah 49b] that there will be a spiritual revolt of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael during the initial period of national revival.... The aspirations for lofty and holy ideals will cease and the nation's spirit will sink....

"The necessity for this revolt will be the tendency for materialism, which must be powerfully generated in the entire nation after the passage of so many years in which the need and availability of material pursuits were completely absent. When born, this proclivity will trample angrily and stir up storms; these are the birth pangs of the Messianic era." (Orot HaTechiyah sec. 44, p. 84)

However, secular Zionism can only bring about the material rebuilding of the Jewish people in their homeland. The nation's complete renewal will only come about when Zionism is restored to its original holiness.

"Secular nationalism may be defiled with much defilement, concealing many evil spirits. But we will not succeed by trying to expel this movement from the nation's soul. Rather we must energetically return it to its elevated source and combine it with the original holiness from which it emanates." (Orot HaTechiyah sec. 22, p. 75)

True Zionism

And what about the Ridbaz's accusations that Rav Kook had descended to heresy, becoming a secular Zionist? Rav Kook responded that Zionism, when based on its true ideals, is nothing to be ashamed of:

"My dear friend! If all Zionists would love the land of Israel and seek the settlement of the Holy Land for the same reason and holy goal that I have in mind — because it is God's land, special and beloved out of the entire world, containing unique holy qualities that foster prophesy and Divine inspiration... then it would be certainly a great honor for every important rabbi and Torah scholar and tzaddik to be such a Zionist. Even your honor should find nothing objectionable in this form of Zionism."

To summarize the salient points in Rav Kook's views on Zionism:

- There are historical precedents for significant Jewish movements in which irreligious Jews played a major role.
- The special merits of Eretz Yisrael will elevate those who participate in its settlement and rebuilding.
- The original roots of Zionism are holy, going back to the disciples of the Gaon of Vilna and the Baal Shem Tov. Zionism must be returned to these authentic holy roots.
- The success of secular Zionism is due to its non-sectarian concern for the entire Jewish people, and it serves as a necessary correction for the imbalances caused by centuries of statelessness.

(Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 175-180. Based on letters from Igrot HaRe'iyah.)

Yom Hazikaron 5785

Rabbi Moshe Hauer

Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day, will be observed tonight and tomorrow, April 29-30, paying tribute to those who gave their lives to build and protect the modern State of Israel. It is a day of intense mourning in Israel, but it has been less seriously observed in the United States.

I do not think I will ever forget past experiences of Yom Hazikaron in Israel. The day is not simply a memorial to Israel's fallen; it is a day in which the country celebrates the value of national service. Whether in emotional communal events, or in the pilgrimage of thousands to the cemeteries, one sees a nation celebrating the role of individuals in its founding and continued existence. Thousands of young students, considering their futures, walk amongst the graves of Har Herzl's military cemetery hearing seventy-year-old and seventy-day-old stories of the individuals buried there, and consciously setting these individuals as their role models. Family members cluster around the graves of close and distant relatives, experiencing both the continued pain of their loss and pride in their contribution to the presence and safety of their people in Eretz Yisrael.

On one occasion, I observed one impressive family gathered in one of the older sections, around the grave of Esther Cailingold. Esther was an Orthodox Jewish young woman who was deeply affected by her work with teenage Holocaust survivors in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and was moved to become a member of the Jewish community in pre-state Palestine. She travelled there in November 1946 at the age of twenty-one to assume a position as a teacher and eventually joined the Haganah. She was wounded and died in the siege of Jerusalem in May 1948. Those visiting her grave were the descendants of her siblings, still holding her memory as a beacon for their values and direction. Esther's letters from that period in Israel are published in a moving book, "An Unlikely Heroine," with her final letter – written six days before her passing – made famous by her brother-in-law Yehuda Avner, who cites it in "The Prime Ministers":

May 23, 1948

Dear Mummy, Daddy and everybody,

If you do get this at all, it will be, I suppose, typical of all my hurried, messy letters. I am writing it to beg of you that whatever may have happened to me, you will make the effort to take it in the spirit that I

want to and to understand that for myself I have no regrets. We have had a bitter fight, I have tasted of Gehenem (Hell) – but it has been worthwhile because I am convinced that the end will see a Jewish State and the realization of all our longings….

I hope that you will enjoy from Mimi and Asher the satisfaction that you missed in me – let it be without regrets, and then I too shall be happy. I am thinking of you all, every single one of you in the family, and am full of pleasure at the thought that you will one day, very soon I hope, come and enjoy the fruits of that for which we are fighting.

Much, much love, be happy and remember me only in happiness,

Shalom and Lehitraot,

Your loving Esther

At this particularly difficult time, it is exceptionally important that we elevate the awareness and engagement of American Jews in commemorating this day, both as an expression of empathy with the many grieving their raw and fresh losses – mitablim imahem – and to demonstrate appreciation and respect for those who have sacrificed their lives for us, for Klal Yisrael. As noted in the Talmud (Bava Batra 10b) regarding the Harugei Lud (the heroes murdered at Lud), those who readily sacrifice everything for their people occupy an exclusive and vaunted place in the World to Come.

This is also an opportunity to highlight the powerful worldview, hashkafat hachayim, of the Religious Zionist community that has borne a disproportionate number of the losses experienced in the past year and a half. The students in that community are driven by a sense of mission to serve G-d and the Jewish people by assuming responsibility to protect and build the modern State of Israel in the way of Torah. That mindset is lacking in our American Jewish value system. We teach our children to be religious, learned, charitable, and to volunteer for good causes, but we do not move them to define themselves in terms of what they can do for their people.

Towards that end the Orthodox Union has once again partnered with Bnei David Institutions in Eli to produce a video presentation for Yom Hazikaron that shines a bright light on the Torah and emunah that drives its students – 29 of whom have given their lives since Simchat Torah 5784 – and others in the Religious Zionist community to volunteer at the front lines in securing and building Israel. Please take a few minutes to learn from this film's story of faith, courage, resilience, and sacrifice.

May we indeed be blessed soon with peace and security for Israel and the world and that those grieving be granted comfort and healing to enjoy the fruits of that for which their loved ones gave their lives.

בצפייה לישועה קרובה,

Sincerely,

Rabbi Moshe Hauer

Executive Vice President

Meeting with Ben-Gvir

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

There are few more polarizing people in the Jewish world today than Itamar Ben-Gvir. The firebrand national security minister of Israel attracts attention, protests, headlines, and controversy wherever he goes. This week, he came to America and brought all of that with him to Florida, New York, and Washington. Many find him abhorrent and categorically reject comments he has made, policies he has pursued, and positions he espouses. Others recognize he has some extreme views but believe he has the courage to make changes necessary for greater security and agree with much of his platform, enough that they have given him a mandate in the current government coalition.

Ben-Gvir's team expressed interest in his speaking at our Shul, which I immediately declined. This was a very simple and clear-cut calculation. I have learned that if hosting someone will attract significant controversy, potentially from within the community and almost certainly from without, if it will draw negative attention, headlines, become time-consuming and can even alienate and offend a fair number of shul members, it simply is not worth it.

Some people who read the above paragraph are undoubtably shocked and disturbed to think we would even consider giving him a platform. And no doubt some who read the same paragraph are offended and troubled that I would attempt to deny the BRS community from hearing an elected Israeli minister whose views they strongly agree with or think at least people should be open to. Both groups are likely disappointed that I am not using this space to take a definitive position on Ben-Gvir. If you want to formulate your own opinion on him or confirm what you already think, there has been plenty written about him, including a large number of articles revolving around his trip that you can read. I have nothing new to add and that isn't my goal in this space.

While we declined the opportunity to publicly host Ben-Gvir, I did accept the request to meet with him privately. We sat together for almost an hour in my office, in which he shared the accomplishments that he is proud of and what remains on his agenda to achieve, explained what he would do to bring the hostages home, shared how he regrets some things he has said and done in his past, and talked about projects he is working on now. I used the opportunity to both respectfully challenge him on things I find objectionable and also encourage him on what I think he could do better or more of.

I had not shared with anyone that we were meeting, neither before or after, and he told me that he hadn't either. Nevertheless, several articles about his trip mentioned in passing that we had met, which elicited two emails respectfully questioning my judgement in having done so, arguing that the meeting alone endorses and supports a person who should be isolated and marginalized.

The correspondence raised some interesting questions: Should private meetings be held to the same standard as giving a public platform? Should we meet with those we don't just disagree with but find objectionable? If a journalist can meet with just about anyone because they are doing an interview or bringing a story to the public, should communal leaders not meet with controversial or objectional public officials in order to better be informed and to share feedback and criticism? If we do have a red line of who we are willing to talk to or meet with, where should the line be set, what are the criteria to be excluded or outside the line? If you wouldn't meet with someone you object to, should they not be allowed to enter the campus, daven in our minyan?

After considering these questions, I don't regret privately meeting Ben-Gvir, for several reasons. Firstly, he is the democratically elected National Security Minister of the State of Israel. Love him or hate him, the position and title he carries, and representing the Israeli citizens who elected him, I believe make him deserving of an audience and conversation. Secondly, I have a relatively broad red line when it comes to fellow Jews, particularly leaders, who want to meet and have a conversation. (That is not to suggest that I have the time or ability to meet every non-BRS member who asks for a meeting) If someone wants to meet, not for a photo op or publicity but for a genuine open conversation, why wouldn't I want to take advantage of the opportunity to listen and learn and to influence and impact, particularly if it was someone I have differences with or even oppose?

I believe this applies to all those to the right and left of me politically and religiously, in Israel or America. I mean this sincerely, and it applies to even the worst actors in politics. I abhor everything Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar stand for and their stances on Israel are dangerous if not outright evil. Of course they would never be welcomed to give a speech at BRS, but if they wanted to meet with me privately, why would I pass on the opportunity to tell elected members of Congress exactly how I feel about their positions and actions? Private dialogue and respectful debate will go much further in bringing change than shunning or boycotting.

The Torah describes that Yosef's brothers hated him to the point that v'lo yachlu dabro l'shalom." The Ibn Ezra explains, "v'lo yachlu dabro l'shalom – afilu l'shalom." It isn't that they just couldn't talk about the issues they disagreed about. It isn't just that they didn't want to be close, loving brothers. It isn't just that they couldn't debate respectfully. "Afilu l'shalom" – they couldn't even give each other a shalom aleichem. The hatred and intolerance had grown so deep that they

couldn't stand to even extend greetings to one another or to be in a room together.
Rav Yehonasan Eibshitz in his Tiferes Yonasan has an additional insight. When we disagree with people, we withdraw from them and stop speaking to them. We see them and paint them as "the other," different than us and apart from us. As our communication breaks down, the dividers rise up, stronger and stronger and we can't find a way to break through them.
Certainly, there are important disagreements and no doubt there are statements and policies that people will find objectionable about others. But there is no doubt in my mind that given the opportunity, it is better, healthier, and more productive, to communicate directly, attempt to influence, and find common ground, than sow further divide. I respect anyone's right to disagree, I just hope they would communicate it directly, instead of boycotting a conversation.

Drasha
By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Parshas Tazria
Kohen... Kohen... GONE!
Parshas Tazria deals primarily with the physio-spirtual plague that affects gossips and rumor mongers with the plague of tzora'as. Tzora'as appears as a white lesion on various parts of the body, and the status of the afflicted depends on its shade of white, its size, and its development. The afflicted does not go to a medical clinic nor does he enter a hospital.
If afflicted he is quarantined and then reevaluated; if condemned he is sent out of the Jewish camp until he heals, a sign that he has repented his slanderous ways. A physician or medical expert does not evaluate him. In fact, the entire ordeal is evaluated, reevaluated, determined, and executed by non-other than the Kohen. Moreover, the Torah does not keep that detail a secret. In the 47 verses that discuss bodily affliction of tzora'as, the Kohen is mentioned no less than 45 times! "He shall be brought to the Kohen," "The Kohen shall look", "The Kohen shall declare him contaminated," "The Kohen shall quarantine him," "The Kohen shall declare him pure" (Leviticus 13:1-47).
Why must the Torah include the Kohen's involvement in every aspect of the process? More so, why does the Torah mention the Kohen's involvement in almost every verse? Would it not been well enough to have one encompassing edict: "The entire process is supervised and executed according to the advice of the Kohen."
The parents of a retarded child entered the study of Rabbi Shlomo Auerbach. They decided to place their child in a special school in which he would live; the question was which one.
"Have you asked the boy where he would like to go?" asked the sage. The parents were dumbfounded.
"Our child cannot be involved in the process! He hasn't the capacity to understand," explained the father.
Reb Shlomo Zalman was not moved. "You are sinning against your child. You are removing him from his home, placing him in a foreign environment, and you don't even consult with the child? He will feel helpless and betrayed I'd like to talk to him."
The couple quickly went home and brought the boy to the Torah sage.
"My name is Shlomo Zalman," smiled the venerable scholar. "What's yours?"
"Akiva."
"Akiva," exclaimed Rabbi Auerbach, "I am one of the leading Torah sages in the world and many people discuss their problems with me. Now, I need your help.
"You are about to enter a special school, and I need a representative to look after all the religious matters in the school. I would like to give you semicha, making you my official Rabbinical representative. You can freely discuss any issue with me whenever you want."
Reb Shlomo Zalman gave the boy a warm handshake and hug. The boy entered the school and flourished. In fact, with the great feeling of responsibility, he rarely wanted to leave the school, even for a weekend; after all, who would take care of any questions that would arise?
Part of the metzorah's (leper's) healing process is dismissal from the Jewish camp. However, it is a delicate ordeal, one wrought with trauma, pain, and emotional distress. The Kohen, a man of peace, love, and compassion must be there for every part of the process. He must be there to guide him through the tense incubation period as well as his dismissal. Moreover, he is there again to ease him back into society.
The Torah teaches us, perhaps more than 50 times, that every traumatic decision needs spiritual guidance. It can turn a cold-hearted punishment into a process of spiritual redemption. It can turn a tough, seemingly dispassionate decision into a beautiful experience.
For when the Kohen holds your hand, even if it is a stricken one, even if you may be leaving for somewhere outside the camp, you are definitely not gone.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed
Redemption through Natural Means
Revivim
The Redemption of Israel—that is, the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' and the 'Settlement of the Land'—must occur through natural means ● The intention of the Torah is that God will assist Israel in fulfilling this commandment ● Without God's help, no human effort will bear fruit ● Due to the abundance of discourse about a miraculous redemption, the commandment to do everything possible to ascend to the Land and settle it, has been forgotten ● The process of redemption will unfold in such a way that initially, Israel will return to their Jewish identity, ascend to the Land, and settle it
The redemption of Israel, that is, the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' and the 'Settlement of the Land', must occur through natural means. For the commandment of ascending to the Land and settling it is a practical mitzvah incumbent upon the entire nation of Israel and upon each individual, and it is fulfilled when the Land of Israel is inhabited by Jews under Jewish sovereignty (see Peninei Halakha: Ha'Am Ve'HaAretz 3:1–3). It follows that the sin causing the delay of redemption is the national negligence in organizing the Ingathering of the Exiles and the Settlement of the Land, and the negligence of each individual Jew in ascending to the Land, and settling it.
Similarly, we find in the second redemption, in the days of the return from Babylon and the establishment of the Second Temple, that most Jews did not ascend to the Land. Therefore, the people of Israel did not succeed in achieving sovereignty over the Land, the Divine Presence did not dwell in the Temple, and we were not obligated in tithes, terumot, and the sabbatical year from the Torah (see Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 12:11). Therefore, the Sage, Reish Lakish, said that he hated the Babylonians who did not ascend to the Land in the days of Ezra, because due to them the Divine Presence in the Temple was partial, the settlement in the Land was weak, and ultimately, the Second Temple was destroyed, and Israel went into a long exile (Yoma 9b).
Those Who Claim That Redemption Must Occur Miraculously
Some claim that, indeed, the essence of redemption is the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' and the 'Settlement of the Land,' but these must come from God through signs and wonders. And so they learned from the plain meaning of the verses, that God will gather the exiles and settle the Land, as it is said:
"Then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and He will return and gather you from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. Even if your exiles are at the ends of the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will take you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the Land that your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers" (Deuteronomy 30:3–5).
And it is also said:
"I will take you from among the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land" (Ezekiel 36:24), and similarly in other verses in the Torah and the Prophets.

The Intention of the Torah Is That God Will Help through Natural Means

However, the intention of the Torah is that God will help Israel to fulfill the commandment, for without God's help no human effort will bear fruit. And if we do not explain it thus, God forbid, we would nullify the commandment that God commanded Israel to settle the Land, as it is said: "You shall dispossess the inhabitants of the Land and dwell in it, for I have given you the Land to possess it. And you shall inherit the Land" (Numbers 33:53–54). And it is said: "You shall possess it, and dwell in it" (Deuteronomy 11:31).

Sanctification of God's Name through Natural Means and Through Miracles

Some claim that if the redemption occurs through natural means, there will be no sanctification of God's name, because only through signs and wonders will His name be sanctified. However, the truth is that the greatest sanctification of God's name is when the children of Israel walk in God's ways, and God blesses the work of their hands through natural means, as explained in the Torah (in the portions of Bechukotai and Ki Tavo). For then, heaven and earth are connected, and God's blessing flows in everything, and all creation sings praise, and it is revealed that "the Lord is God in heaven above, and on the earth below; there is no other" (Deuteronomy 4:39). And as Rabbi David Tabil wrote, that when God governs the world in a hidden manner under the wings of nature, "this is the highest form of governance… by sending blessing in the work of their hands… as was the case in the wars of David," and this was a greater sanctification of God's name than the miracle that God performed for Hezekiah in his war against Sennacherib. Therefore, King David, of blessed memory, did not ask God to perform a miracle for him. "For King David, of blessed memory, estimated in his soul that he was ready and prepared to be a chariot for receiving the divine abundance, even in his physical structures, his arteries, and his material sinews… and the desire was that he himself would strike them, and this is the greatest of the levels" (Nachalat David, Discourse 1).

The Meaning of the Description of Redemption through Miracles

Two interpretations have been given for the fact that the prophets described the redemption through miraculous means (Isaiah 11:1–10; 30:25–26; Ezekiel 38:18–23, and others), and both are true. The first is to explain that God will help Israel succeed in ascending to the Land and settling it. And the miraculous aspect of the descriptions is expressed in metaphorical language, to describe the great wonder of the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' and the 'Settlement of the Land' that was desolate and ruined and will become blooming and prosperous, something that has not happened to any nation or land. And what is said that the wolf will dwell with the lamb, means that the wicked of the world, who are likened to wolves, will not do evil to kill (Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 12:1).

The second is that the miraculous descriptions were said about the World to Come, which is after the days of the Messiah and the redemption, which is indeed beyond the nature of this world, and entirely miraculous for us. This is what our Sages said: "There is no difference between this world and the days of the Messiah except for the subjugation to kingdoms alone" (Sanhedrin 99a), meaning, that even in the days of redemption, the world operates as usual, except that Israel is free in their Land and can choose the good, and only afterward, in the World to Come, nature will be perfected and elevated.

The Encouragement, and the Risk

Indeed, at times we find in the words of early and later authorities who wrote about the imminent redemption that it would occur through miraculous means, contrary to the commandment of Settling the Land, which, as we have learned, is a practical mitzvah that must be fulfilled through natural means, and contrary to the destiny of Israel to reveal God's word through natural means. And perhaps they feared that Israel would despair of their redemption, after it seemed that there was no chance to act for the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' and the 'Settlement of the Land,' and therefore, they encouraged their spirits with the hope of a miraculous redemption, beyond nature. And there is truth in this, because even when redemption comes through suffering and natural means, there is an aspect of a miracle that is unbelievable. However, due to excessive talk about miraculous redemption, the commandment to do everything possible to ascend to the Land and settle it was forgotten, and thus, when it was possible to ascend to the Land, they remained in exile, and great and terrible troubles came upon us: the Holocaust, the rule of the evil communist regime, and assimilation. Perhaps there was no choice, and without the hope of a miracle, we would not have survived, but the price of relying on the miracle was unbearably heavy.

Indeed, had they studied the Torah properly, they would have understood that the commandment of Settling the Land obligates Israel in every generation to do everything possible to ascend to the Land, and consequently, in modern times, when suitable conditions were created, according to the Torah, it was necessary to ascend to the Land and build it, thereby advancing the process of Israel's redemption.

The Words of the Rambam

And so we find that many of the Sages of Israel, headed by Rabbi Akiva, hoped that Bar Kokhba would be the Messiah, and if redemption depended on miracles, it would not have been conceivable that Bar Kokhba would be the Messiah, for all his actions for the independence of Israel were through natural means. And so the Rambam wrote:

"Do not think that the King Messiah must perform signs and wonders, or bring about new things in the world, or resurrect the dead, and similar things that the fools say. It is not so. For Rabbi Akiva, a great sage of the Mishnah, was the arms-bearer of King Koziba, and he would say about him that he is the King Messiah, and he and all the sages of his generation thought that he was the King Messiah, until he was killed due to sins. Once he was killed, it became known that he was not the Messiah. And the sages did not ask him for a sign or a wonder" (Hilchot Melachim 11:3).

The Words of the Later Authorities

And so wrote Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer in his book Derishat Tzion:

"The redemption of Israel, which we await, let no one think that suddenly the Lord, blessed be His name, will descend from heaven to earth, saying to His people, 'Go out!' Or that He will immediately send His Messiah from the heavens to blow a great shofar for the dispersed of Israel, and gather them to Jerusalem, and make for her a wall of fire and a Temple descending from above" (Geulat Tzion, Essay 1). Rather, the redemption will come by Israel awakening to ascend to the Land and settle it, and from this, all the words of the prophets will be fulfilled in us.

And so wrote his colleague Rabbi Eliyahu Gutmacher:

"Many err in thinking that they will sit… each according to his way in his home, and suddenly the gates of mercy will open, miracles will be performed in the heavens and the earth, and all the prophecies of the prophets will be fulfilled, and they will be called from their place of residence. But it is not so," rather, they will need to act naturally to ascend and settle the Land (Shivat Tzion, pp. 260-261 in the Har Bracha edition).

And so wrote many, among them the Malbim:

"For the redemption will sprout gradually… and the settlement of the Land of Israel will precede the coming of the Messiah" (ibid., p. 196).

And so wrote Rabbi Yehoshua of Kutna that it is a commandment to ascend to the Land, and settle it,

"…for the Ingathering (of exiles) is the beginning of redemption" (Yeshuot Malko, Yoreh De'ah 66). And so wrote the Netziv (ibid., pp. 200-205).

The Process of Repentance and Redemption

From examining the words of the Torah (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), and the prophets (Ezekiel chapter 36), we have learned that the process of redemption will occur in such a way that initially Israel will return to their Jewish identity, ascend to the Land and settle it, and this is called "and you will return to ('ad' in Hebrew, lit. 'up until') the Lord your God," and not "to" completely, and from this, they will continue to progress until they return in complete repentance "to the Lord your God." So wrote and taught Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook ztz"l ('The State as the Fulfillment of the Vision of Redemption,' LeNetivot Yisrael Part 1, p. 281 in the Beit El edition). And so wrote before him

Rabbi Alkalai in the name of Rabbi Yehuda Bibas (Writings of Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai Part 1, p. 20, Part 2, p. 324). And so wrote Rabbi Teichtal in the book 'Eim HaBanim Semeicha' (pp. 109-120), based on many sources, "that the essence of repentance (in the first stage of redemption) is the return and restoration to the Land of Israel, thus fulfilling all those who have deviated from the ways of the Torah and commandments due to our many sins, the repentance that the Lord, blessed be He, expects… and afterwards the Holy One, blessed be He, will open their hearts with a great opening, and incline their hearts to love Him, and serve Him with all their heart."

In the Merit of Those Engaged in the Commandment of Settling the Land, We Merit Redemption

Rabbi Kook wrote: "They ask: What merit did our generation have for redemption? The answer is simple: it merited because it engaged in the greatest commandment of all the commandments, in the commandment equivalent to the entire Torah, because it engaged in the redemption of Israel. And not only did it engage, but it engages, and will engage incessantly, in its redemption, and this divine power elevates and exalts it in salvation" (Shmona Kevatzim 7:201).

[CS late-breaking post
from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>
date: Apr 30, 2025, 7:07 PM

Rabbi Yakov Haber -

On Words and Birds

The majority of the sections of parshiyos Tazria and Metzora discuss the detailed halachos of both the impurity and the purification process of the metzora as well as those of clothing and houses stricken with tzara'as.[1] Chazal and the commentaries (see Rashi to Tazria 13:46 and to Metzora 14:4) unanimously identify tzara'as as an outward manifestation of spiritual deficiency whose sole cure is repentance. This is indicated by the metzora's being "brought before the kohein" (14:2) (see Kli Yakar), the spiritual guide who facilitates his atonement not only through declaring his state of impurity and purity but by performing the various acts of purification and offering several korbanos to facilitate the process of correcting his sins. Perhaps it is not unreasonable to assume that, besides the formal acts of purification performed by the kohein, a knowledgeable kohein would also speak to the metzora instructing him in a tailor-made program of teshuva to assure that the sins causing the tzara'as can be properly avoided in the future.

The Talmud (Arachin 16a) lists seven sins whose punishment can be tzara'as.[2] The ones most highlighted by the commentaries are the sins of lashon hara and gasus haruach (arrogance). Indeed, the Gemara (ibid. 15b) and Midrash (Tanchuma, Metzora 3) list various Biblical allusions linking tzara'as and the sin of lashon hara. The word מצורע can be viewed as an abbreviation of מוציא שם רע – one who defames another's reputation. The verse from Mishlei (21:23), " שומר פיו ולשונו, שומר מצרות נפשו – One who guards his mouth and tongue, guards his soul from travails," can also be read with a play on words as שומר מצרעת נפשו – he saves himself from tzara'as, also indicating a linkage between lashon hara and tzara'as.

Not surprisingly then, the commentaries teach that the purification process presented in parshas Metzora contains many symbolic atonements of and spiritual techniques for correcting these sins. Quoting the verse from Mishlei (18:21), "החיים והמות ביד הלשון – Life and death are in the hands of the tongue," the Chafetz Chaim (al Hatorah) explains that to correct the flaw of evil speech engaged in by the metzora, he must go to a kohein, one whose speech is primarily the holy speech of Torah ("כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת, ותורה יבקשו מפיהו" (Malachi 2:7)) and whose very words determine the impurity and purity of the afflicted one. Thus, evil speech causes the punishment, and the holy speech of the kohein facilitates spiritual rehabilitation. Kli Yakar (14:4, s.v. "v'ta'am lishtei tzipparim") and Sefer Apiryon (by Rav Shlomo Gantzfried, famed author of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, quoted in Tal'lei Oros) both interpret the symbolism of the two birds brought, one slaughtered and one set free, as indicative of how the metzora should now act. Birds chirp, alluding to chatter or speech (see Rashi from Chazal to 14:4). The former metzora must "kill" or cease the evil speech as indicated by the slaughter of one bird. But he cannot just stop talking! He must now use speech exclusively in a proper manner, engaging in words of prayer and Torah study as alluded to by the freeing of the live bird which also chirps. A similar idea is recorded in an anecdote about Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan zt"l, who, after publishing his central work, Chafetz Chaim on the laws of lashon hara, was approached by an individual who complained to him, "Rebbe, after you published this work, we cannot say anything!" To this, the tzadik replied, "On the contrary! Before I described when speaking evil of another is prohibited and when it is permitted, you couldn't open your mouth out of concern that maybe what you were saying was lashon hara. Now that you have a detailed guide as to the assur and the mutar, now you can speak!" Indeed, it is said of the Chafetz Chaim that he was a very pleasant conversationalist; he just was careful to only speak that which is permitted. This story alludes to an important, additional type of permissible, and sometimes even required, speech. Proper speech does not solely consist of words of Torah and prayer but sometimes, when the occasion calls for it, includes even derogatory words when they are done l'toeles, for a positive benefit in order to protect someone from damage. Lashon hara l'toeles has detailed laws as to when and how it is permitted – all spelled out in detail in the sefer Chafetz Chaim and related works – and is often not just allowed but required in fulfillment of the commandment of "lo sa'amod 'al dam rei'acha" – not standing idly by when a fellow Jew is in danger of being harmed.[3]

The blood of one bird is to be dripped into mayim chayim, spring water. Kli Yakar explains that this also alludes to eliminating evil speech and substituting words of Torah, which is compared to "living waters," for the sinful speech. The atonement of the sin of haughtiness which also causes tzara'as is alluded to by the earthenware utensil which the water and blood are placed in. When a keli cheres absorbs non-kosher food, it cannot be kashered; it must be broken – "ein lo takana ela shevira." This alludes to "breaking" one's ego in repentance. Of course, the sins of lashon hara and haughtiness are interrelated. One who has an overinflated sense of their worth will take the liberty of bad-mouthing others to gain popularity; one who is properly humble views harming another just as severely as harming oneself.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains the allusion conveyed by the two birds in an opposite manner. He first notes the parallel to the two goats brought on Yom Kippur. Whereas one is slaughtered and its blood is sprinkled in the Holy of Holies, the other is "v'shilach - sent away." So too concerning these two birds, one is slaughtered and one is sent away. A bird, not generally accepting subjugation to a master, represents unbridled animalistic freedom, that which, when manifested by a human being, leads to a sinful life both bein adam laMakom and bein adam lachaveiro, his sense of personal gratification not allowing for the sensitivity necessary to be a cooperative member of society. The teshuva process of the metzora requires the subjugation of his animal nature to the will of G-d, or, in the language of Tanya, the subjugation of the nefesh habehamis to the neshama Elokis. The slaughtered bird represents this subjugation of the animal nature of man to the higher order of sanctity commanded by Hashem, its blood being placed in "mayim chayim," representing the values of Torah. Physical involvement in the world is not to be eschewed; it is to be channeled for a higher purpose. The second bird being freed "on the face of the field" symbolizes sending the unfettered animal nature where it belongs, in the wild, not in human behavior. The fact that Chazal teach us both concerning the two birds of the metzora and concerning the two goats of Yom Kippur that they are to be acquired together and to look alike further highlights the idea of free choice; each creature represents the same human being, and he can decide whether to live a life of sanctity or the opposite.

On a practical level, especially in an era of instant messaging including the ability to forward something sent on the internet to thousands of people in a split second, the encouragement of consumers of goods and services to write a review of the product and the seller and an environment fostering instant comments on everything one does and

everywhere one visits, the proper application of permitted or even required speech versus prohibited speech takes on even greater scope and significance than in the past. The only solution is to study the laws of lashon hara thoroughly from a variety of sources available in so many different forms beyond the original classic sefer Chafetz Chaim and to seek Rabbinic guidance in different situations. May Hashem guide us to use the very essence of our humanity, our ruach memal'la, only in a befitting manner.

[1] In light of the firmly established concept that the medical condition known as leprosy is not identical with tzara'as, I chose to consistently use the Hebrew term without translation.

[2] They are: gossip, murder, false or vain oaths, arayos, arrogance, theft and stinginess.

[3] A similar allusion to the proper balance between speaking and not speaking can perhaps be found in the interrelationship between the silent cloth pomegranates and the noisy bells attached to the me'il of the kohein gadol, the garment which atoned for evil speech. (See also Chafetz Chaim al Hatorah, Tzetaveh.)

לע"נ
יוחנן בן יקותיאל יודא ע"ה
שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל

Israel's religious community has shouldered a disproportionate burden in the past 18 months of war: A rabbi weighs in on what that portends

By Judah Ari Gross (April 30, 2025) *

The massacres in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, were overwhelmingly an attack on kibbutzim, particularly secular ones. But the burden of the war that resulted from those attacks has disproportionately been shouldered by Israel's "national religious" community, in terms of both the number of casualties and the amount of reserve service that its members have performed over the past 18 months.

It can be seen anecdotally in the memorials at flagship religious Zionist schools and yeshivot, and it can be seen quantitatively in a study published late last year by the Israel Democracy Institute.

In the study, a bar graph shows reserve service over time by religious affiliation, with secular and "traditional" Israelis serving at roughly the same level as their portion of the population, while those who identify as religious are serving at nearly twice that rate, with religious soldiers making up 27.4% of combat reservists, while religious Israelis make up 14.7% of the population. The graph also shows that Haredim who make up 14.5% of the population, made up 2.1% of reservists in 2024. The study also found that, unlike secular Israelis whose share of reserve duty has decreased over the course of the war, the share of religious reservists has been going up. This represents a major challenge not only for the reservists themselves, who often serve at the cost of their careers and salaries, but — for those who have families — also for their spouses and children, who are forced to contend logistically and emotionally with their prolonged absences.

A result of this has been that a disproportionate amount of the casualties in the past 18 months of war have also been religious.

This was not always the case. A study last year by Israeli military scholar Yagil Levy found that the proportion of religious troops killed in war is more than 10% higher in the current war — officially known as the Iron Swords War — than it was in the 2014 Gaza war or the 2006 Second Lebanon War.

The effects of these losses on the religious community and on Israeli society in general will likely be profound. As Israel continues to debate the issue of military enlistment for Haredim, some of the harshest voices are coming from the religious Zionist community, who can credibly argue that they are bearing the burden of Haredi exemptions.

To better understand the effects of the past 18 months of war on Israel's national religious community, eJewishPhilanthropy spoke with Rabbi Kenneth Brander, the president and rosh yeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a moderate religious Zionist network of schools and religious institutions.

* https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/israels-religious-community-has-shouldered-a-disproportionate-burden-in-the-past-18-months-of-war-a-rabbi-weighs-in-on-what-that-portends/ I have copied and presented the introduction. **Follow the link above for the interview with Rabbi Brander.** Judah Ari Gross is managing editor at eJewishPhilanthropy. Prior to joining eJP, Judah was a correspondent for the Times of Israel, reporting first on the military and then on Israel-Diaspora affairs and religion.

Judah Gross' interview with Rabbi Brander follows:

JAG: There is a certain tension there though because you may not want to count how many fallen or injured soldiers are from the religious Zionist community, but the fact that so many have come from that background gives the community a standing to speak on certain issues, particularly related to military enlistment for Haredim.

RKB: I think the religious Zionist community would be doing itself a disservice if we reminded everybody how many fell from our community. I think that people are smart, and I think people recognize it by themselves, and those who do not yet recognize it will recognize it.

There have been more than a dozen times in the past year that Haredi people have stopped me and said, 'I know that you're connected with Ohr Torah Stone, and it's nice that your young people know what they're supposed to be doing.'

And it will be pretty evident on Yom HaZikaron. I don't think we should be promoting it. But I think the message is out there.

Regarding the Haredi community, it's a personal struggle of mine.

Today, I was at the Straus Kollel, and I saw a guy who came back to the yeshiva early, and I said to him, 'What are you doing?' He goes, 'I'm studying Yoreh De'ah [a medieval halachic work that is also used as a shorthand to refer to the preparations for the "forbidden and permissible" section of rabbinical examinations, which deals with kashrut and food].' I said, 'What year are you in the study of Yoreh De'ah? He goes, 'I'm in year two of studying Yoreh De'ah.' Now normally Issur v'Heter [forbidden and permissible] takes a year to study. So I was a little puzzled for around 30 seconds. And then he said to me, 'Oh, my first year of studying Issur v'Heter I was in the army for 300 days. So really he didn't have two years. He had a year in Lebanon with a little Issur v'Heter on the side, and now he's studying his second year.

And his fellow test takers for the rabbinate didn't spend 300 minutes in the army, let alone 300 days. And they don't have to spend another year preparing for the exam, as opposed to him. And that does anger me. And in some ways I'm angry at myself. It does anger me. I just need to make sure that I don't allow that anger to consume me. Because I have too much to do to be consumed by anger. I'm hurt by it. I have two children in the IDF. Another one in the reserves has spent north of 200 days doing that. And all of our kids would be doing less [if more Haredim served in the military] — and not just kids, it's 50 year olds who are still doing reserve duty.

I'm upset about it. I think they violate halacha. I think they've made the beit midrash into a 'city of refuge,' and I think their Torah is not complete. But I cannot allow myself to make that my cause because I'm not going to accomplish anything. I need to make sure that I inspire our students to be the future leaders of the Jewish people, both in the religious sector and in the public sector, and work on giving them the tools so they are the next leaders in the Knesset, in the courts and in the business world.

JAG: If we're discussing the enlistment issue. While the focus now is on Haredi enlistment, religious women are also exempt from military service. Of course, the situation is different because religious women perform national service, which Haredim don't, but is that an area that you expect to change or are pushing to change within the religious Zionist community writ large? I know that Ohr Torah Stone is working to facilitate religious female military service.

RKB: The plural of anecdotes is not data, so let's look at some of the data: Out of the 8,000 young ladies who graduated from religious schools in June 2024, 3,500 of them decided to go into the IDF, and 350 of them decided they wanted to go into combat.

I think the religious Zionist community has decided to [follow] the Rambam and the [line of] gemara that says that in a [necessary] war … that the groom and bride still under their chuppah have a responsibility to serve. I don't think that that's an Ohr Torah Stone thing, I think that's a halachic phenomenon that is catching up with the reality. And I don't understand how anyone ignores that halacha.

That being said, I look at the fact that 3,500 young women from the modern Orthodox or religious Zionist community have said they want to serve in the army. What is Kenny Brander's responsibility to that

group? Our responsibility is to give them the spiritual infrastructure before they serve. We have a program, Ma'aminot B'madim ["Believers in Uniform"], in which we answer halakhic questions for hundreds of young women.

And 350 young women decide they want to do combat. I want to make sure that there are combat units that are in-country that are religiously sensitive, which includes having women serving as their halakhic leaders. So we created that program because the demand is there, and I think we have a responsibility to serve that demand.

I don't know if Ohr Torah Stone and [its institution for women] Midreshet Lindenbaum has updated its webpage, but the webpage at least used to say that we do not endorse women serving in combat units. I hope that we've changed the website. I haven't checked. (Ed. note: The website does still say that the institution does not endorse combat service.)

I see 3,500 women joining the IDF out of 8,000, and I'm not sure, but I'd be shocked if the number in June 2025 doesn't go past the 50% mark. So I see these numbers, and I think our job is to assist the young women and the young men in the ways that we can.

JAG: We have reported in the past about Ohr Torah Stone's increased focus on mental health in response to the Oct. 7 attacks and the current war, but another area of potential concern going forward, particularly for the religious Zionist community, which has suffered many losses, is the possibility of radicalization. Is your network concerned about that? Are you taking any steps to prevent it?

RKB: First of all, I don't think we've seen the end of this, so I'm not sure that whatever answer I give you is the same answer that will be truthful in two years from now. But there are two parts to the answer: One is I have not seen that. Not that we're not at times angry, but I have not seen that. I haven't seen Arab workers being attacked or anything else like that.

Two is that Rabbi Yaakov Nagen and Rabbi Aharon Lavi who run our interfaith program and work with our post-high school programs are trying to make sure that there are constant conversations about respect and responsibility to others, irrespective of the fact that we need to be strong on defense. Being strong on defense doesn't mean you beat up every single person that doesn't look like you, and we need to communicate that nuance because that's what Judaism is about. It's about the dialectic. It's about nuance and we need to communicate that. We are making sure that Rabbi Nagen and Rabbi Lavi are communicating those messages.

It means that we have more iftar events. It means that when a Druze soldier falls, it can't be that we don't send a busload of kids to make a shiva call. When the Druze community in the north [Majdal Shams] lost so many young people, it can't be that we don't put together a way for communal spiritual leaders to make a shiva call. We have to make sure that we don't lose our humanity and we have to make sure that we don't lose the whole reason why we want a state.

And it's not just so you study the Jerusalem Talmud in Jerusalem, but so you can study the Jerusalem Talmud and see the parts of it that are not relevant outside of Israel become relevant here, which includes embracing 'the stranger who lives in our midst.' And I therefore have to make sure that my students understand that this Yom Yerushalayim, we will do a flag march through the Mahane Yehuda market [instead of the path through the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, which is often marked by antagonism toward non-Jewish residents of the city]. So we are respectful and then we go to the Kotel.

There are complicated issues. I have not seen more anger over it. There is more confusion, but I think our responsibility is to articulate ways to think about that confusion, which under the leadership of my colleagues, Rabbi Nagen and Rabbi Lavi, I think we're doing.
I can tell you that the moderate Arab governments are asking us to play roles in this, of having religion be a multiplier and not a divider. And so has the Israeli government asked us to play roles in this.

Those involved can't be perceived as "left wing." They are halachic Jews who are not willing to allow our halachic responsibility to protect our land to compromise our responsibility to make sure that our land has the norms and mores that Judaism asks of us.

JAG: And where will you be on Yom HaZikaron? RKB: I will start Yom Zikaron at night. I will commemorate locally [in Jerusalem] with the people on my block and friends and all of us who've lost people. On Yom HaZikaron morning, I will be first at Derech Avot, at one of the boys high schools that has lost eight alumni this year and five alumni and faculty in the past years from acts of terror or acts of serving the army. And then I will immediately go to Katz Oriya High School for girls, which is five, 10 minutes away by car, where there have been three losses. And then I'll go to Mt. Herzl. The goal is to get there before the siren, and with the help of the guy who drives me, we normally beat Waze's predicted arrival time. We'll either get there in time or we'll stop at the side of the road.

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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.