

Torah Tidbits

ISSUE 1367 APR 25TH '20 א' אייר תש"פ

פרשת תזריע מצורה

PARSHAT TAZRIA METZORA
SHABBAT ROSH CHODESH



AN OMER MYSTERY

By Rabbi Shmuel
Goldin
see page 48



YOM HA'ATZMAUT SPECIAL

Rabbi David
Samson,
Rabbi Sam Shor &
Rabbi Shimshon
Hakohen Nadel
see page 66



"עין
לציון
צופיה"

YERUSHALAYIM IN/OUT TIMES FOR SHABBAT PARSHAT TAZRIA METZORA

Candles 6:39PM • Havdala 7:54PM • Rabbeinu Tam 8:33PM



WORD OF THE MONTH



YAALEH V'YAVO REMINDERS Omitting YvY in the Maariv Amida does not invalidate it; one does not repeat the Amida. Omitting it at Shacharit or Mincha does invalidate the Amida and it must be repeated. **Omitting YvY from Birkat HaMazon does not invalidate it - weekday or Shabbat - and one does not repeat the Birkat HaMazon.** (Omitting R'TZEI in Birkat HaMazon on Friday night or the main Shabbat day meal requires repeating. Omitting it at Seuda Sh'lishit, one does not repeat.) **The first of these months can fall on Shabbat: (Tishrei), Marcheshvan, Sh'vat, Adar, Adar Alef, Adar Bet, Nisan, Iyar, Av.** The 30th of these months can be on Shabbat: Kislev (1-R"Ch Tevet), Sivan (1-R"Ch Tamuz), Av (1-R"Ch Elul).

CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



CANDLES	EARLIEST	TAZRIA METZORA	HAVDALA	ACHAREH-K'DO		
				CANDLES	EARLIEST	HAVDALA
6:39	5:52	Yerushalayim / Maale Adumim	7:54	6:44	5:56	8:00
6:56	5:54	Aza area (Netivot, S'derot et al)	7:56	7:01	5:58	8:01
6:55	5:53	Beit Shemesh / RBS	7:55	7:00	5:57	8:00
6:54	5:52	Gush Etzion	7:54	6:59	5:56	7:59
6:56	5:54	Raanana / Tel Mond / Herzliya / K. Saba	7:56	7:01	5:58	8:02
6:55	5:53	Modi'in / Chashmona'im	7:55	7:00	5:57	8:01
6:56	5:54	Netanya	7:56	7:01	5:58	8:02
6:53	5:53	Be'er Sheva	7:55	6:58	5:57	8:00
6:54	5:53	Rehovot	7:56	7:01	5:58	8:01
6:39	5:54	Petach Tikva	7:56	6:44	5:58	8:02
6:55	5:53	Ginot Shomron	7:55	7:00	5:57	8:01
6:46	5:54	Haifa / Zichron	7:57	6:52	5:58	8:03
6:54	5:52	Gush Shiloh	7:54	6:59	5:56	8:00
6:54	5:54	Tel Aviv / Giv'at Shmuel	7:56	6:59	5:58	8:02
6:54	5:53	Giv'at Ze'ev	7:54	6:59	5:56	8:00
6:54	5:53	Chevron / Kiryat Arba	7:54	6:59	5:56	7:59
6:57	5:55	Ashkelon	7:56	7:01	5:58	8:02
6:56	5:54	Yad Binyamin	7:56	7:01	5:58	8:01
6:45	5:52	Tzfat / Bik'at HaYarden	7:55	6:50	5:56	8:00
6:53	5:51	Golan	7:54	6:58	5:55	8:00

Rabbeinu Tam (J'lem) - 8:33pm • next week - 8:38pm



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OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

RANGES ARE 11 DAYS, WED-SHABBAT
 28 NISSAN - 8 IYAR
 (APRIL 22 - MAY 2, '20)

Earliest Talit & T'filin 5:10-4:58am
 Sunrise 6:02½-5:52½am
 Sof Z'man K' Sh'ma (Magen Avraham: 8:41-8:34am) 9:20-9:14am
 Sof Z'man T'fila (Magen Avraham: 9:53-9:48am) 10:26-10:21am
 Chatzot (Halachic noon) 12:37½-12:36pm
 Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha) 1:11-1:10pm
 Plag Mincha 5:51-5:56pm
 Sunset (counting elevation) (based on sea level: 7:13-7:20pm) 7:18-7:25pm

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TAZRIA-METZORA



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

[P> X:Y (Z)] and [S> X:Y (Z)] indicate start of a parsha p'tucha or s'tuma. X:Y is Perek:Pasuk of the Parsha's beginning;

(Z) is the number of p'sukim in the parsha.

Numbers in [square brackets] are the Mitzva-count of Sefer HaChinuch AND Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot. A=ASEI; L=LAV (prohibition). X:Y is the perek & pasuk from which the mitzva comes.

KOHEN FIRST ALIYA
13+12+6=31 P'SUKIM -
12:1-13:23

[P> 12:1 (8)] Perek 12, the shortest in the Torah with 8 p'sukim (not that we are responsible for the chaptering of the Torah), deals with "birth". A woman becomes "ritually unclean" following a (normal) birth - one week for a boy - and on the 8th day the boy is circumcised - and two weeks for a girl. This period of TUM'A is followed by a special "waiting time" of 33 or 66 days for boy or girl respectively, after which the mother is to bring the korbanot of a YOLEDET. The whole issue of the "ritual impurity of a woman having given birth" constitutes a mitzva [166, A100 12:2], as does the bringing of the sacrifices [168, A76 12:6]. (Mila itself is counted in Lech L'cha.) This portion of the Torah is also the source of the general prohibition of eating "sacred meat" while in a state of "ritual impurity"



STATS

	TAZ	METZ	T&M
of 54 sedras in Torah	27th	28th	-
of 10 in Vayikra	4th	5th	-
Lines	128	159	287
Rank (Among The 54)	48th	40th	-
Parshiyot	9	7	16
P'tuchot	5	4	9
S'tumot	4	3	7
P'sukim	67	90	157
Rank (Torah/Vayikra)	48/8	42/5	-
Words	1010	1274	2284
Rank (Torah/Vayikra)	48/8	39/4	-
Letters	3667	4697	8364
Rank (Torah/Vayikra)	48/8	39/4	-



MITZVOT

	TAZ	METZ	T&M
Mitzvot (pos/prohib)	7+2	11+0	18+2

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[167, L129 12:4].

TAHARA & TUM'A To oversimplify, one aspect of the rules of ritual purity and impurity for a Yoledet (a woman who has given birth) is to show the sharp contrast between life and death. This can be seen in the Tum'a of a dead body, in the laws of Nidah, the rules of pregnancy, as well as the Yoledet. A woman's period signifies that life has not begun within her - there is TUM'A. A pregnant woman has life developing within her - TAHARA. When that life emerges into the world, she is no longer carrying that extra life - TUM'A.

Another aspect of the procedures for the new mother is geared to help her recoup her physical, psychological and emotional identity and well-being.

[P> 13:1 (8)] After the parsha of BIRTH, the Torah moves on to the topic of NEGA'IM (various skin afflictions). The rest of Tazri'a and most of M'tzora deal with this topic.

A person with an affliction that MIGHT be Tzora'at (in one of its many forms) is to be examined by a kohen (expert in the laws and identification of N'GA'IM, with a degree, perhaps, in dermatology, as well). Under certain circumstances, the kohen might declare the afflicted person a M'TZORA rendering him immediately TAMEI (ritually unclean). Or, a kohen might order a one week quarantine with an additional examination to determine the status of the individual, to take place on the seventh day of said quarantine. That second inspection can result in the person being declared "clean" or "Tamei",



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or an additional week of quarantine can be ordered.

[P> 13:9 (9)] A kohen must examine a case of suspected Tzora'at. He looks for changes in coloration of skin and hair, raised or sunken appearance of the blemished area, increase, decrease or no change in size, and other signs. Sometimes he declares immediate Tzora'at. Sometimes "ritual purity" is declared immediately (in which case a trip to a dermatologist and the pharmacy for a salve might be the best thing). And sometimes a quarantine is declared.

The expertise of a kohen in the area of Nega'im is both an art and a science. And more. Dozens of shades of white and other colors must be distinguishable to the inspecting kohen. An error in perception of a white like the shell of an egg as opposed to the color of the thin membrane under the shell can make the difference between declaring the examinee Tahor or Tamei (for example). Only certain times of the day are permitted for examining a NEGA, because of the different effects of light and shadow.

The laws of Nega'im are difficult and complex. In addition to everything else, the kohen had to know the psychology of the cases and be sensitive to the personal situations of the afflicted. One example

is that a new bride or groom is not examined by the kohen, so they cannot be declared TAMEI. That could spoil their moods.

A look at some of the Mishnayot in TAHAROT, even without going in depth, can give one an appreciation of what is involved in this topic. Once again, learning comes to the rescue and allows us to get "involved" in mitzvot even when they aren't active.

[P> 13:18 (6)] The Torah presents further details on what the kohen looks for when inspecting boils and similar afflictions on the skin. The elaborate checking and time delays from inspection to inspection serve to give the afflicted person ample time for introspection. A NEGA on the outside mirrors a character blemish or a religious shortcoming on the inside. While the kohen examines the external, the Metzora does a thorough job of seeing his own inner being.

MITZVAWATCH

Why all the detail? Why are there so many different types of NEGA'IM? Perhaps it is because WE are all different. So many different types of people. So many different temperaments. So many different sins. And so many different personal reactions to our individual situations. We need to feel this individuality. It helps us be responsible for our own deeds. One imagines that the kohen-examiner played the role of counselor too, maybe sensing a disturbed



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soul that needs TIPUL along with the NEGA.

LEVI SECOND ALIYA
5+11=16 P'SUKIM -
13:24-39

[S> 13:24 (5)] This portion discusses burns on the skin and different colorations within the affected area. Keep in mind that a blemish of any sort is NOT Tzora'at unless declared so by a kohen. It could look like Tzora'at, but it isn't unless declared "Tamei" by a kohen. In fact, two people can have identical N'GA'IM and one can be declared a M'tzora, the other not so. And the treatment of each case is completely different as a result.

[P> 13:29 (9)] This next portion deals with yet another type or two of N'GA'IM - sores on the head, neck, or face, and blotches on the skin. As was mentioned before, we are dealing here with a complex issue of a bridge between the physical and the spiritual. Or, to put it differently, of physical manifestations of spiritual problems.

To help understand this idea better, think of the following analogy: There are physical afflictions and psychological problems that people can suffer. Sometimes, each type is treated independently. But sometimes, a trained professional in the field will see the physical and psychological problems as being connected. In those cases, it is very important for the professional to decide what gets treated and what will improve

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when the other does, even without special attention.

One example is mental stress which causes a rash or an asthma attack. Manage the stress and the physical symptoms can disappear (sometimes).

This was only an analogy, but this is one of the lessons, of Torat HaM'tzora, the laws of N'GA'IM. Mind, Body and Soul...

The laws regarding the state of ritual impurity resulting from Tzora'at constitute a positive commandment [169, A101 13:29]. In other words, we would be doing the wrong thing to ignore these laws and details (when they are halachically active). There is a specific prohibition of cutting the hair of a Tzora'at area on the body [170, L307 13:33]. Among other reasons, this would remove an important indicator for the kohen-inspector (and more importantly, perhaps, for the afflicted person.)

Let's run with the analogy. If a doctor feels that a rash on a patient who came to him might be the result of stress and tension in the workplace, then it would serve no purpose to merely treat the rash. In fact, the rash might clear up after some stress-reduction measures without treating the rash itself. In the case of N'GA'IM, it would be prohibited to treat the NEGA with physical means. Welts, burns, blemishes, boils, etc. might go away after T'shuva and the Tzara'at procedures. How can a korban heal an affliction? How can T'shuva heal it? Same question as, How can psychological counseling cure asthma. But it

can (sometimes) and so can all of the "remedies" in this week's sedra. Mind, body, soul - they are all connected and interrelated.

[S> 13:38 (2)] In this small parsha, the Torah gives an example of a rash of white spots erupting on the body. In this case, the rash is just a rash. and the afflicted person is TAHOR. Check with his family doctor.

SHLISHI THIRD ALIYA

15 P'SUKIM - 13:40-54

[S> 13:40 (7)] Certain cases of baldness are discussed in the first part of this portion. Usually, baldness is just baldness. But occasionally, the skin that is exposed when the hair falls out is blemished in specific ways which might mean Tzora'at.

A person who has Tzora'at, tears his clothes, lets his hair hang loose, and must announce in public that he is TAMEI. The proper conduct of the M'tzora is a mitzva [171, A112 13:45].

[S> 13:47 (13)] The rest of this Aliya deals with infection of Tzora'at on garments. Wool, linen and leather are the materials that are subject to Tzora'at HaBe'ged. This also constitute one of the 613 mitzvot [172, A102 13:47].

R'VI'I FOURTH ALIYA

5+12+8=25 P'SUKIM -

13:55-14:20

The fourth Aliya is always the bridge

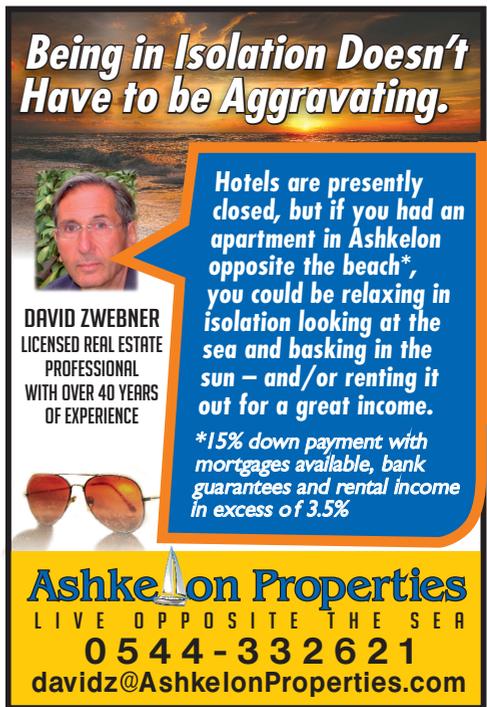
Aliya between combine sedras

The topic of "afflictions of garments" continues into this Aliya, for the duration of the Tazria part of the double reading. The fact that there is such a thing as an affliction of a garment tells us something. We are dealing with different ways that G-d communicates his "displeasure" with us, as individuals. Today, we might say, His communication is more subtle - but we must see it... and react appropriately.

On that note... In the VIDUI text, we find "stubbornness" mentioned twice - KISHINU OREF (we have been stiff-necked) and AL CHEIT... B'KASHYUT OREF. One of the definitions of this sin is the refusal to associate things that happen to us with our behavior. Passing off something bad that happens as "things happen" or coincidence is part of the problem of stubbornness. Not that we know why something happens. We don't. But bad things that happen should move us to self-examination, to introspection. And those thoughts should lead us to improvement in areas of character traits and behaviors of ours that need improvement.

[P> 14:1 (20)] The afflictions presented in Tazria are immediately dealt with by the procedures for purification described in M'tzora.

The main theme of M'tzora is the "ritual purification" of one afflicted with Tzora'at, and certain other conditions that render a person TAMEI. These procedures constitute a positive mitzva [173,A110 14:2]. Two birds are to be



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taken, a ceremony is performed with them, one bird is slaughtered, and the other is set free. The person immerses in a mikve, he cleans his garments, and he shaves all the hair on his body [174, A111 14:9]. The rules of ritual immersion in general, come from this context [175, A109 14:9].

The purification process is completed after bringing various korbanot, following a seven-day period and the other procedures, as mentioned above [176,A77 14:10].

SDT

Notice how the M'tzora is isolated from others during the time he is ritually unclean. That gives him time to examine himself, his deeds, his thoughts. But as part of the process of purification, as part of the process of having a second chance in the world, he is ministered to by a kohen who becomes the first contact in his renewal procedure. There is a significant psychological factor in the topic of N'GA'IM.

CHAMISHI 5TH ALIYA

12 P'SUKIM - 14:21-32

[P> 14:21 (12)] A person who cannot afford the animals for the sacrifices, is to bring one lamb and two birds as his offering. The Torah describes the rituals involved in these offerings.

It is not important how much the sacrifice is worth on a dollars and cents basis (shekels and agorot), but what is relative to the means of the atoner.

Thus ends the section of the Torah dealing with afflictions to the individual. ZOT TORAT... this is the body of law of one afflicted who cannot afford the full set of korbanot.

SHISHI SIXTH ALIYA

21+19=40 P'SUKIM -

14:33-15:15

[P> 14:33 (25)] The Torah next discusses Tzora'at that can afflict a person's house. This can only be in the Land of Israel, in a house made of specific materials, and under specific conditions [177, A103 14:35]. Once again, it is the kohen who makes the determination as to whether Tzora'at does exist, or a professional house painter should be consulted. In the case of a "house plague", there are procedures to be followed and purification processes, including korbanot to be brought.

SDT

Not only does a person's body contain elements of spirituality, but so does his home - but only in Eretz Yisrael. Although we do not "practice" this whole topic today, the lessons of the bridge and connection between the physical world and the spiritual one should not be overlooked. A person whose home is a meeting place for Torah scholars, a launching pad for acts of charity and kindness, a training ground for a new generation of sensitive, feeling, enthusiastic Jews, such a home cannot be infected by spiritual plague. A home devoid of spirituality is a prime target for

Nig'ei HaBayit. In this case, it is not the anti-rust and anti-mold paint that makes the difference. It is the values that a Jew lives by and their effect on the next generation.

This parsha concludes with a summary of the different types of NEGA'IM.

We also find a curiosity among these p'sukim - specifically, two consecutive p'sukim of three words each. Unique in the Torah.

[P> 15:1 (15)] Next the Torah speaks of the status of a man with an "unnatural discharge" (probably a form of venereal disease). In such cases, the Torah view matters as a combination of physical symptoms with spiritual causes - in the case of "Zav" and "Zava", most probably attributable to sexual misconduct. The one afflicted is himself "Tamei" as well as causing other people and objects to become "ritually impure" through contact, both direct and indirect [178, A104 15:2]. The one afflicted, must bring special korbanot after a purification process [179,A74 15:13].

SH'VII SEVENTH ALIYA

13+5=18 P'SUKIM -

15:16-33

[S> 15:16 (3)] There is also a "ritual impurity" (of a lesser degree i.e. one-day type) in cases of a normal seminal emission [180,A105 15:17].

A menstruating woman is "ritually unclean". This is counted as a positive

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mitzva [181, A99 15:19]; the prohibition "other side of the coin" to this mitzva is in Acharei.

[P> 15:19 (6)] A woman with an unnatural discharge has a specific set of rules. In the case of a Zava, there are differences in her status depending upon how many sightings of blood there are, and how frequent.

[S> 15:25 (9)] The longer-term Zava is presented in its own parsha, a S'TUMA that can be seen as a sub-parsha of the previous P'TUCHA that introduced the topic of ZAVA. These rules and procedures constitute a mitzva [182, A106 15:19].

The requirement of the korbanot at the conclusion of the period of impurity is a mitzva [183, A75 15:29]. The people of Israel have a great potential for attaining spiritual heights. They have an equally great potential for descending to low levels of spiritual impurity.

MAFTIR IN 2ND TORAH 7 P'SUKIM BAMIDBAR - 28:9-15

Chapters 28 and 29 in Bamidbar (Parshat Pinchas) deal with the daily

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and Musaf korbanot in the Mikdash. The two Shabbat p'sukim followed by the five that deal with Rosh Chodesh are combined for Maftir of Shabbat Rosh Chodesh.

Notice that the Musaf of Shabbat is an expanded version of the weekday sacrifices and Rosh Chodesh's Musaf is like those of the Chagim. This is logical, when you think about it. Six days... and on the 7th - Shabbat is one of the days of the week and the unique and special one among them. The Chagim belong to the Jewish calendar, which is based on the months and Rosh Chodesh.

HAFTARA 24* P'SUKIM - YESHAYAHU 66:1-24

The Haftara for Shabbat-Rosh Chodesh, the last chapter of Yeshayahu, preempts the regular Haftara (usually). The obvious reason for the choice is found in the next to the last pasuk, which mentions both Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh. This pasuk is reread after the last pasuk, so that the book of Yeshayahu - and this Haftara - can end on a brighter note than its real end provides. This chapter, as all chapters in Yeshayahu from 40 and on, contains a message of consolation. Specifically, this chapter tells us that G-d cannot be contained in the physical Mikdash, nor is He interested in sacrifices that are not offered with sincerity. This message is appropriate always, and the association with Shabbat - week in & week out - Rosh Chodesh - month in & month out, fits. ■



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THE PERSON

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB

OU Executive Vice President, Emeritus

IN THE PARSHA

Going At It Alone

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

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

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

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

Opinions vary as to why he must be removed from society. Some say simply that he is quarantined because his condition is contagious. Others insist that since his misdeeds caused harm to others, he must be punished by living apart from others.

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

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

The Spring 2010 edition of *The American Scholar* carries an essay by William Deresiewicz which he delivered to the plebe class at the United States Military Academy at West Point in October of last year. The essay is entitled “Solitude and Leadership.”

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

He emphasizes the importance of

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

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

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

The sages of the Talmud insist upon the necessity of *cheshbon hanefesh*

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

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

necessary for spiritual growth and for religious leadership.

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

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

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

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

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Words That Heal

In *A Beautiful Day in the Neighbourhood* (2019), Tom Hanks plays the beloved American children's television producer presenter Fred Rogers, a legendary figure to several generations of young Americans, famous for his musical invitation, "Won't you be my neighbour?"

What makes the film unusual is that it is an unabashed celebration of the power of human goodness to heal broken hearts. Today such straightforward moral messages tend to be confined to children's films (some of them, as it happens, works of genius). Such is the power and subtlety of the film, however, that one is not tempted to dismiss it as simplistic or naïve.

The plot is based on a true story. A magazine had decided to run a series of short profiles around the theme of heroes. It assigned one of its most gifted journalists

to write the vignette about Rogers. The journalist was, however, a troubled soul. He had a badly broken relationship with his father. The two had fought physically at his sister's wedding. The father sought reconciliation, but the journalist refused even to see him.

The jagged edges of his character showed in his journalism. Everything he wrote had a critical undercurrent as if he relished destroying the images of the people he had come to portray. Given his reputation he wondered why the children's television star had agreed to be interviewed by him. Had he not read any of his writings? Did he not know the obvious risk that the profile would be negative, perhaps devastatingly so? It turned out that not only had Rogers read every article of his that he could get hold of; he was also the only figure who had agreed to be interviewed by him. All the other "heroes" had turned him down.

The journalist goes to meet Rogers, first sitting through the production of an episode of his show, complete with puppets, toy trains and a miniature townscape. It is a moment ripe for big-city cynicism. Yet Rogers, when they meet and talk, defies any conventional stereotype, turns the questions away from himself and toward the journalist, almost immediately senses the core of unhappiness within

him, turns every negative question into a positive affirmation, and exudes the calmness and quiet, the listening silence, that allows and encourages the journalist to talk about himself.

It is a remarkable experience to watch as Hanks' gentleness, immovable even under pressure, slowly allows the journalist – who had, after all, merely come to write a 400 word profile – to acknowledge his own failings vis-à-vis his father and to give him the emotional strength to forgive him and be reconciled to him in the limited time before he died. Here is a fragment of their conversation, that will give you a feel for the tone of the relationship:

Journalist: You love people like me.

Fred Rogers: What are people like you? I've never met anyone like you in my entire life.

Journalist: Broken people.

Fred Rogers: I don't think you are broken. I know you are a man of conviction. A person who knows the difference between what is wrong and what is right. Try to remember that your relationship with your father also helped to shape those parts. He helped you become what you are.

Note how in a few brief sentences, Rogers helps reframe the journalist's self-image, as well as his relationship with his father. The very argumentativeness that led him to fight with his father was something he owed to his father. The film (though not all the plot details) is based on a true story about the real Fred Rogers and the journalist Tom Junod. Junod, like

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his character in the film, came to mock but stayed to be inspired. He said about the experience, “What is grace? I’m not certain; all I know is that my heart felt like a spike, and then, in that room, it opened and felt like an umbrella.” The film is, as one reviewer put it, “a perfectly pitched and played ode to goodness.”¹

The point of this long introduction is that the film is a rare and compelling illustration of the power of speech to heal or harm. This, according to the Sages, is what Tazria and Metzora are about. *Tsara’at*, the skin condition whose diagnosis and purification form the heart of the parshiyot, was a punishment for *lashon hara*, evil speech, and the word *metzora*, for one suffering from the condition, was, they said, an abridgment of the phrase *motzi shem ra*, one who speaks slander. The key proof-text they brought was the case of Miriam who spoke badly about Moses, and was struck with *tsara’at* as a result (Num. 12). Moses alludes to this incident many years later, urging the Israelites to take it to heart: “Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam along the way after you came out of Egypt” (Deut. 24:9).

Judaism is, I have argued, a religion of words and silences, speaking and listening, communicating and attending. God created the universe by words – “And He said ... and there was” – and we create the social universe by words, by the promises with which we bind ourselves to meet our obligations to others. God’s revelation at

Sinai was of words – “You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Deut. 4:2). Every other ancient religion had its monuments of brick and stone; Jews, exiled, had only words, the Torah they carried with them wherever they went. The supreme mitzvah in Judaism is *Shema Yisrael*, “Listen, Israel.” For God is invisible and we make no icons. We can’t see God; we can’t smell God; we can’t touch God; we can’t taste God. All we can do is listen in the hope of hearing God. In Judaism, listening is high religious art.

Or it should be. What Tom Hanks shows us in his portrayal of Fred Rogers is a man who is capable of *attending* to other people, listening to them, talking gently to them in a way that is powerfully affirming without for a moment being bland or assuming that all is well with the world or with them. The reason this is both interesting and important is that it is hard to know how to listen to God if we do not know how to listen to other people. And how can we expect God to listen to us if we are incapable of listening to others?

This entire issue of speech and its impact on people has become massively amplified by the spread of smartphones and social media and their impact, especially on young people and on the entire tone of the public conversation. Online abuse is the plague of our age. It has happened because of the ease and impersonality of communication. It gives rise to what has been called the disinhibition effect: people feel freer to be cruel and crude than they would be in a face-to-face situation. When you are in the physical presence

1 Ian Freer, *Empire*, 27 January 2020.

of someone, it is hard to forget that the other is a living, breathing human being just as you are, with feelings like yours and vulnerabilities like yours. But when you are not, all the poison within you can leak out, with sometimes devastating effects. The number of teenage suicides and attempted suicides has doubled in the past ten years, and most attribute the rise to effects of social media. Rarely have the laws of *lashon hara* been more timely or necessary.

At the risk of disclosing a spoiler, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighbourhood* offers a fascinating commentary on an ancient debate in Judaism, one discussed by Maimonides in the sixth of his *Eight Chapters*, as to which is greater, the *chassid*, the saint, the person who is naturally good, or *ha-moshel be-nafsho*, one who is not naturally saintly at all but who practices self-restraint and suppresses the negative elements in their character. It is precisely this question, whose answer is not obvious, that gives the film its edge.

The Rabbis said some severe things about *lashon hara*. It is worse than the three cardinal sins – idolatry, adultery, and bloodshed – combined. It kills three people: the one who speaks it, the one of whom it is spoken, and the one who receives it.² Joseph received the hatred of his brothers because he spoke negatively about some of them. The generation that left Egypt was denied the chance of entering the land because they spoke badly about it. One who speaks it is like

an atheist.³

I believe we need the laws of *lashon hara* as rarely before. The social media are awash with hate. The language of politics has become *ad hominem* and vile. We seem to have forgotten what Tazria-Metzora are meant to remind us: that evil speech is a plague. It destroys relationships, rides roughshod over people's feelings, debases the public square, turns politics into a jousting match between competing egos and defiles all that is sacred about our common life. It need not be like this.

Shabbat Shalom ■

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3 *Arakhin 15b.*

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2 *Arakhin 16b.*



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THE PROPHETS

As this Shabbat is also Rosh Chodesh Iyar, Chazal established that we are to read the final perek in Sefer Yishayahu (chapter 66) in which the navi foresees a time when all will come to worship Hashem in Yerushalayim on each Shabbat and every Rosh Chodesh. Nonetheless, these are exceptional times. I therefore felt that the selection ordinarily read for these parshiyot, a reading taken from the seventh perek of M'lachim B, offers us an important message for these trying times. For that reason, the article I share with you focuses upon the haftarah that COULD have been read today.

The opening words of the haftarah that we ordinarily read for this parasha, provides us with the clear connection to our parshiyot. “V’arba’ah anashim hayu metzora’im petach hasha’ar,” “And there were four metzora’im (lepers?) at the gate (of the city Shomron)” echoes the topic covered in the

Torah reading: laws of contamination and purification of the metzora. The rest of the haftarah, however, seems to have little connection, if any, to the detailed laws of tum’ah and tahara that fill the parshiyot we read. There is, however, an important lesson we can learn from the salvation brought to Israel by Hashem through these four metzora’im.

In its comprehensive review of the laws of Tzora’at the Torah condemns the leper to isolation—“badad yeshev,” he must remain isolated, outside of the Israelite camp. As our haftarah relates, these ‘lepers’ were, indeed, relegated to a “lonely” area, isolated outside of the city. I would imagine that such a punishment, a limited form of “solitary confinement,” would have the effect of alienating these impure individuals. How understandable it would have been for these abandoned individuals to turn their back on the



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community that had treated them in such a fashion. Indeed, a close reading of the episode seems to indicate that these metzora'im may have well grappled with these feelings.

Upon discovering that the enemy camp had been abandoned and that the Aramean army had left all their belongings and provisions behind, these starving people pounced upon the booty to satisfy their hunger and thirst. Certainly, an understandable reaction by the suffering outcasts. But as they began to take the wealth that the enemy left behind, they paused, considered and agreed that it would be wrong of them to enrich themselves and, thereby, delay spreading the news to their starving brethren in the city. "We would be considered sinful" they said, if they did not return to the city before dawn to report on their findings.

These people had been "rejected," in a sense, by their own and yet they understood that despite being relegated to dwell outside the city, they were still part of Am Yisrael, and remained connected to the body politic. They were still expected to act responsibly.

The Israelites who remained in the city also understood that these "outcasts" were not cast out of the nation. They did not question the fact that their salvation had come through those who were exiled "out of the camp." They didn't reject their report or their help. They too recognized that even those who might have sinned and been separated from the nation were still part and parcel of their nation.

This year, when we've all been isolated from our Batei Knesset, our families and our neighbors, we may be tempted to focus inward-on ourselves and those who remain within the walls of our homes. But we learned from these metzora'im and we have responded magnificently!! During these dark and difficult days we have proven that we care for others: for the elderly, who spend lonely days with little in their cupboard, for the ill, who need our concern and our prayers and for those who continue to take care of the sick and whom we honor and thank. Even when we are "outside" of the camp we refuse to focus upon ourselves alone because we recognize that we are all PART of that camp. And perhaps, being sent outside of the camp was is not so much a punishment as it is a time to ponder how connected we truly are to each other.

On this Shabbat that precedes Yom Ha'atzma'ut, we must keep in mind this important lesson. The establishment of our State was a miracle wrought by Hashem and brought to fruition by those who, many mistakenly believed, were "outside of the camp," distant and separated from the Jewish nation and Jewish values. And yet, Hashem chose them to help bring His salvation to His suffering people, because He recognized that they never felt that distant; that they were never truly "outsiders."

Galut, the exile, was long and painful. During this time of Geulah, of ingathering, we dare not keep any Jew outside of the camp. ■



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Calling Out Impurity

The Torah prescribes several actions that must be performed vis-à-vis a person afflicted with *tzaraat*:

והצרוע אשר בו הנגע בגדיו יהיו פרטים וראשו יהיה פרוע ועל שפם יעטה וטמא וטמא יקרא. (ויקרא יג:מה)

And the leper upon whom the *nega* is [located] – his clothes shall be ripped, and his head disheveled, and he shall cloak his upper lip and shall cry out: “*tamei, tamei.*” (*Vayikra* 13:45)

The simple reading of the end of this verse means that the leper has to call out “*tamei, tamei*” to others, presumably to notify others of his impure state. This is how Rashi understands it. It is also possible that it means that others call “*tamei, tamei*” as though attesting to his impure state.

The Shelah HaKadosh offers a different interpretation based on a *gemara* (*Kiddushin* 72b) that states that one who condemns another condemns with his own faults. A *tzaru'a* is one who badmouths others, who calls others impure. One who recognizes specific faults with others, who always highlights others' shortcomings, is

likely subject to the same shortcomings. He publicly denounces it on others to deflect it from himself. The *pasuk* can thus be read as meaning that the impure one will call others impure.

The Baal Shem Tov says something similar in a comment on a mishna in *Nega'im* (2:5):

כל הנגעים אדם רואה חוץ מנגעי עצמו

A person can see all *nega'im* aside from his own *nega'im*.

The basic meaning is that a *kohen* may diagnose a *nega* for anyone but himself. The *baalei musar* read this homiletically to mean that it is easy for a person to diagnose the faults of others but not his own faults. The Baal Shem Tov goes even further, suggesting that by placing a comma at a different spot, the mishna takes on a radically different meaning (place the comma after the word “*chutz*”): “All the *nega'im* that a person sees outside are of his own *nega'im*.” Every fault that one finds with another is actually one's own fault.

To clarify the point, the Baal Shem Tov told the story of a town milkman who was suddenly summoned to court. He was a very honest man and was surprised that someone had filed a complaint against his integrity. The plaintiff was the baker

in town. The baker was accustomed to acquiring all his dairy products from this milkman. The baker suspected that the milkman was cheating him, so he weighed the butter. Lo and behold, what was labeled as a pound of butter was in fact slightly less. On the day of the trial, the milkman arrived in court for the first time in his life. The judge recited the alleged crime of fraud by selling incorrect measurements of goods. The judge then asked the milkman whether he checks the weight of the goods he sells with a professional scale. The milkman replied that he does not own a professional scale. The judge responded in disbelief: "How can you just estimate the weight of products! You just decide on your own? That's cheating!"

The milkman responded that he does not own a professional scale but has another way of determining the accuracy of the weight of his products. "Every morning," the milkman said, "I buy a pound of bread from the baker. I put the bread on one side of a scale and the butter on the other side. When it's balanced, I know that's a pound of butter."

The judge the turned to the baker, now red in the face and says. "One who condemns another condemns with his own faults."

At this point in time when we ourselves are all separated from others like a *Tzarua*, before we begin to explore and disclose ("call out") the faults of others, let us look deep inside ourselves and see how we can improve. ■

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The Metzora Mystery

Among the laws of *tzara'at*, there is one that stands out as most fascinating. If a person finds himself afflicted with *tzara'at* and is completely covered with white spots from head to toe, then he is rendered as *tahor*, pure. How is this possible? Doesn't the presence of blemishes demonstrate absolute impurity?

The Chafetz Chayim explains that in such a case this person is undoubtedly impure. Rather, the Torah is emphasizing that he need not go into isolation for the purpose of introspection. When there is only a small spot of *tzara'at*, one can convince himself that it appeared by chance and is not really a sign from Above.

In such a case, the one afflicted must be quarantined; he must take the time to introspect and see where he has veered from the correct path. However, when one is completely overspread by *tzara'at*, he is clearly aware that he has seriously sinned. The feeling of admission is itself part of the rectification.

Rav Dunner in *Mikdash Halevi* emphasizes another aspect that the Torah is teaching us here. When a person has a small *nega* he can easily hide it; his appearance to the outside world remains one of righteousness. The Chatam Sofer characterizes such a person as living a life of hypocrisy. This scenario is extremely dangerous since there is no indication of his misconduct and others can potentially be negatively influenced. However, one who is completely covered with white blotches is clearly marked as a transgressor. The *nega* is therefore *tahor* since he will be alienated automatically.



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The afflicted person himself is at the height of impurity.

The Admor M'gur learns a moral lesson from this *passuk*. Most often *tzara'at* comes as a punishment for speaking *lashon hara*. When one is completely covered with white marks it is a sign not that he said something wrong, rather he did not say something right when he could have. When a person misses an opportunity to say something positive, to complement or encourage another, Hashem shows him his error. He can therefore be covered in *tzara'at* yet be *tahor*.

Rav Pincus in *Tiferet Shimshon* recalls a fascinating insight that explains how it is possible for a person in this case to indeed be pure. When a person reaches a level of intense impurity at which he is entirely covered with *tzara'at*, Hashem has compassion and purifies him. We see a similar circumstance when *Am Yisrael* reached the 49th level of *tumah* in Mitzrayim, Hashem in His benevolence freed us from bondage. In a similar vein, the *halachah* states that when the Jews surround an enemy city in battle, they must leave one side open as a potential exit. If there would be no way for the enemy to escape, they would be totally oppressed and Hashem would have mercy on them, thus endangering the Jews' ability to win. Thus, we can understand the gemara in *Sanhedrin* that tells us *Mashiach* will come when all governments are completely heretical; when the world reaches this stage, Hashem will have mercy and will bring the Final Redemption. May it come speedily in our days. ■



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Shlomo Michael ben Meir z'l

Tazria- Metzora: Find Good, Do Good

Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt'l, the renowned *Mashgiach* and author of the classic *Alei Shur*, was one of the great educators, thinkers and Torah personalities of our generation.

A yeshiva student came to Rav Wolbe and asked for advice and guidance in dealing with the challenge of *shemiras ha-lashon* and refraining from *lashon hara*. The Gadol acknowledged him warmly, but remained immersed in his studies. A group of *talmidim* gathered around, awaiting his response, speculating on what it might be. Would the *Mashgiach* suggest that the student set an extra daily seder learning the laws of proper speech? Would he recommend adding a special *tefilah* prayer for success in that area, or perhaps advise him to refrain from speaking for a specific time period and

conduct a *taanis dibbur*?

The wise *Mashgiach* finally lifted his head, and in the sweetest of tones, said, "Make sure to perform three acts of kindness, and to share a good word, a compliment or word of encouragement with someone you meet, every day.'

ELEVATING OUR SPEECH

Our sedra (*Tazria*) introduces the prohibition of *lashon hara*, the consequence of which would be *tzaraas*, a spiritual 'leprosy', resulting in exile from the community, being forced to leave the encampment of the Jewish People and remain outside, isolated and alone.

"And Hashem formed man, dust from the earth, *Vayipach b'apav nishmas chayim*, "He blew into him the soul of life," and man became a *nefesh chayah*, a "living spirit" (Bereishis 2:7). Targum Onkelos provides a literal translation of the Torah, here defining man as *ruach memaleleh*, "a spirit that speaks". Speech expresses our Divine root, and enables us to connect with others and with Hashem. *Shemiras ha-lashon* in its fullest sense is fulfilling the deepest potential of the faculty of speech, and it is rooted in our awareness that we are all created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in the image of G-d.

Elevating our speech and speaking positively about others hinges on the *mitzvah* of *V'ahavta lereyacha kamocho*, the commandment to “love your fellow as yourself.” When we express hurtful or damaging words, embarrassing or being dismissive of others, we act in a way which undermines the *tzelem Elokim*, their Divine soul, and ours as well.

One's heart is drawn after their actions

A person who has contracted *tzaraas*, a *metzora*, was *motzi ra*, ‘finding’ or ‘deriving’ *ra*, the negative in someone else. He fell prey to the gravitational pull to point out what is lacking in his vision of another.

Rav Matisyahu Solomon shlit'a, the Mashgiach of Beis Medrash Gavoha in Lakewood, points out, “We have all heard a thousand times that the Temple was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred, and we have received countless reminders through the words of the Chafetz Chaim, that if we would stop speaking *lashon hara* we would be redeemed. And yet, somehow, we have failed to internalize the message!” In *Sefer Matnas Chayim*, Rav Solomon reveals the root of our failure to maintain holy, elevated speech: a lack of faith in ourselves.

Faith in ourselves is essential, because when we feel good about ourselves and are confident with our own stature, we can recognize the value and good in others as well.

To strongly harness the power of speech, however, we still must realize that our words leave a mark in this world and in the world Above. We have an awesome potential to build or destroy, to draw close or *chalilah*, create distance. The gift of speech represents the infinite trust that Hashem has in us, and in creating us in His image. Knowing that every word we speak actualizes the *nishmas chayim* that we were imbued with in our creation is a powerful starting point for maintaining dignified speech.

Perhaps this is the underlying message in Rav Wolbe's advice: *Acharei ha-peulos nimshach ha-levavos*, “One's heart is drawn after their actions.” By doing good, we imbue our internal experience with goodness, and we feel positivity toward those whom we assist. More and more do we trust the fact that we are generous, kind and capable of benefiting others, and this in turn influences us to see others as generous, kind and capable. We reveal to ourselves our own *tzelem Elokim*, and that of others, and begin to live in a Divine, redeemed world.

May we grab the opportunity and internalize the inner message of our sedra, and may we commit ourselves to add even just three deliberate acts of kindness or encouraging words to those around us, every day. And may the promise of the Chofetz Chayim be fulfilled in our time. ■

Dedicated for the Refuah Sheleima of Rav Matisyahu Solomon, R' Matisyahu Chaim ben Ettl.



Waiting After Hard Cheese Part 1

The average Jew is familiar with the halacha of waiting a period of time following the consumption of meat before eating dairy products. Less well-known are cases where one must wait after consuming dairy before eating meat.

The Talmud (*Chulin* 105a) explicitly states that meat may be consumed following dairy as long as one rinses his mouth in between. Based on this gemara, early authorities conclude that there is no obligation to wait a length of time between drinking a cup of milk and consuming meat (beef or chicken).

Why would the order of eating change the need for waiting?

The *Rashba* (*Torat Habayit Ha'aroch* 3:4) explains, based on the two following principle reasons, why we wait between meat and milk. One reason is that meat is hard, and generally gets stuck in one's teeth for up to six hours. The other reason is because the flavor of meat is so strong that a meat "flavor" remains in one's throat or pharynx for up to six hours. The *Rashba*

claims that neither of these reasons relate to milk products, as the flavor is not strong and dairy products don't normally get stuck in one's teeth.

However, Ashkenazi authorities mention that these two reasons exist when one eats hard cheese.

The *Maharam* of Rothenburg (Responsa 6:15) recounts how once when he had eaten cheese, he later found the cheese stuck in his teeth, and from that moment on he made an oath that he would wait between cheese and meat as done between meat and milk. He explains that even though there is a prohibition to add on to rabbinic decrees in the area of meat and milk, one is allowed to be more stringent than the letter of the law because in the Talmud itself we find scholars who added stringencies for themselves. The *Darkei Moshe* (YD 89:2), as well as other authorities, explain that the *Maharam* had been eating hard cheese and not regular cheese.

The *Issur V'heter* concludes that one should not eat meat after hard cheese based on the second reason: since hard cheese has a very potent and strong flavor, the taste remains for a number of hours.

Both the *Maharam* and *Issur V'heter* acknowledge that the practice to wait is a stringency. Regardless, they claim that



there should be a waiting period between hard cheese and meat.

The flavor must be so potent that it could be felt for some time after consumption

The *Rema* (YD 89:2), rules that it is preferable to wait between hard cheese and meat as one would wait between meat and milk. In addition, even though this halacha is based on a stringency, no differentiation is made between beef and chicken. In other words, even if chicken is eaten after hard cheese, there must be a waiting period (see *Pri Megadim* YD 89:2).

There is a dispute amongst the later authorities as to what is the real basis of this stringency. The *Taz* (89:4) holds that the potent flavor is the main reason (like the *Issur Veheter*) while the *Shach* (89:15-17) seems to regard the cheese between the teeth as the main reason (similar to the *Maharam* of Rothenburg).

According to many contemporary halachic authorities, we are stringent based on both reasons (the cheese being hard, or having a very potent flavor even if the cheese is not especially hard).

What is the qualification for “hard”

cheese or potent flavor? Many early sources consider cheese that has been aged for six months (*Torat Chata'at* 76:2) as hard. Any lesser amount of time would not be considered hard cheese. With regard to potent flavor, this area is slightly more complex. It would seem that the more pronounced flavor is due to the bacteria used to ferment the cheese. However, certain potent flavors can result from other factors too. Halachically, in order to classify a cheese as strongly flavored, the flavor must be so potent that it could be felt for some time after consumption (*Aruch Hashulchan* 89:11). We might also assume that if the cheese's flavor is as strong as the flavor of cheese that was aged for six months, then it is required to wait before eating meat.

Common cheeses that are aged for over six months are Sharp Cheddar, Parmesan, Emmental and Romano. Typical examples of cheeses that are not aged yet have potent flavor are Limburger and Roquefort.

More details regarding this important halacha will be discussed in next week's article. ■

Kashrut Questions in Israel?

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RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

Safeguarding the Soul

Each year when we arrive at these *parshiot* we endeavor to find their meaning and relevance. After all, the laws of *tzaraat* are no longer applicable; the affliction itself simply does not exist in our day.

The Chassidic master, Rebbe Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter of Ger (1847-1905), also known by the title of his main work *Sfat Emet*, searched for a spiritual message embedded in these obscure laws. He offers two unique perspectives.

It is well known that the Sages draw a straight line between the sin of *lashon hara* and the punishment *tzara'at*. The *Sfat Emet* emphasizes that the seriousness of the sin relates to the fact that the mouth of a Jew should be used to bring honor to God. He quotes as a proof-text the prophet Isaiah, "This people I formed for myself so that they proclaim my praise" (43:21). There is so much good that we can and must accomplish with our words. When we speak disparagingly, we are being disloyal to ourselves and to our Creator.

The transgression of *lashon hara* is not

just 'another sin'. It cuts to the very core of what it means to be Jew. The mission of our people and of every individual is to testify and bring glory to God's presence in the world. When we use our speech in a negative way, we undermine this very assignment.

The Rebbe explains that although the soul is embedded deep within us, we need to reveal it. The thick layer of physicality that surrounds the soul can be penetrated. Although the soul is submerged, we activate its potency when we engage in acts of kindness, Torah study and *tefilla*.

In a word, this is the *tzelem elokim*, 'God's image' found within us. The more we actualize our spiritual potential, the less we are encumbered by physicality, and the core inner light shines.

The Rebbe suggested the following: Take note of fact the *tzaraat* ailment appears on a person's skin. The skin symbolizes the outer layer or covering of man. It is here that man interacts with others and the world around him. The *tzaraat* is another layer added to the skin. An additional barrier now covers the *neshama*. The moment a person speaks *lashon hara* or diverts from the right path, he causes his soul to be further submerged; it sinks to a place where it is

now even more hidden.

ועל ידי לשון הרע בא נגע...דהיינו, שהגוף מכסה הארת הנשמה שבקרבו...לכן על ידי חטאים ולשון הרע נמצא בהם נגע ומעכב החיות מלהתגלות (שפת אמת תרמ"ט ד"ה במדרש)

Throughout his writings, the Rebbe often offers different perspectives on the same theme. In the year 5655 (1895), he suggested to his chassidim a different explanation of *tzaraat*: the covering of *tzaraat* over the skin can actually be viewed as being useful.

An outer layer is affixed as a protection so that it can now begin to heal and return to its full strength

The added layer serves to remind the one who has transgressed that he/she has an inner holiness that needs to be safeguarded. At that moment, when the pristine character of the soul has been marred, Hashem sends a message to the individual that he dare not allow his soul to be degraded any further. This added layer can be seen symbolically as serving as a protective layer for the *neshama* found within.

דהנה, כמו שהגוף הוא שמירה לנפש, ויש עוד שמירה לגוף, וכמו כן הבית שמירה יותר מבחוך, וכמו כן הוא בפנימיות ולכן הנגעים כלם הם שמירה לנפש. (שפת אמת תרנ"ה ד"ה בפרשה)

This idea certainly resonates with us from our daily experience. That which is most valuable to us we take careful precautions

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to protect. We place our money in a bank; prized possessions we place in a vault or a safe. Hashem, so to speak, is encasing the soul temporarily in a protective casing in order that it not be sullied. *Tzaraat*, which is described in the Torah as appearing on the walls of one's home, on one's clothing, and on one's skin 'sounds an alarm' that more caution is necessary.

These two perspectives offered by *Sfat Emet* can be viewed as working hand in hand. The laws of *tzaraat* contain a dual message: on the one hand, the layer of *tzaraat* can be understood symbolically as a further concealment of the soul which we sadly bring upon ourselves. When one sins, one's inner light and beauty is obscured. From another perspective, when the soul has been weakened, it now needs to be carefully protected so that it is not harmed any further. An outer layer is affixed as a protection so that it can now begin to heal and return to its full strength.

The *Sfat Emet*, in these two *divrei Torah*, draws on one of Judaism's fundamental notions; a notion that fascinated the Chassidic masters. Every individual is built of two elements: body and soul; physical

and spiritual. This idea is first revealed in the story of man's creation: "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living being." (Bereshit 2:7). The Ramban writes in his Torah commentary, "This verse alludes to the exaltedness of the human soul, its essence and its mystical source" (*Ramban* 2:7). An ancient tradition recorded by *Onkoles*, translates the words *nefesh chaya* ('living soul') as "speaking spirit". Speech, which is unique to man, is the window to our soul.

Chassidic thought emphasizes that our soul's yearnings should transform our entire personality. A well known chassidic teaching tells the story of a certain hidden tzaddik, Reb Leib, who wandered from place to place in search of true spirituality. He went to sit at the feet of the illustrious master, the Maggid of Mezritch (1704-1772). Following his visit he said, "I did not go to the Maggid in order to hear Torah from him but to see how he unlaces his shoes and laces them up again." (*Tales of Hasidim*, Martin Buber vol 1, p.107). In other words, he wished to learn how the inner soul should permeate every aspect of our lives

When learning the parshiot of *Tazria* and *Metzora*, the holy *Sfat Emet* elegantly reminds us that the *neschama* within man is the source of our holiness. It is this divine gift which when treated properly offers us a path toward transcendent living. When we actualize our potential by expanding our inner light, we develop as humans into the most lofty of God's creations. ■

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Sunday, April 26 – 2 Iyar, 9:00AM – 1:00PM

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9:00 – 9:15 The Miracle of Medinat Yisrael
Zemira Ozarowski

9:15 – 10:05 A Halachic and Hashkafic Understanding of Yom Haatzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim
Rabbi Chanoch (Eli) Ozarowski

10:10-11:10 My Return Home from Shlichut in the U.S.: A Conversation with
Mrs. Sivan Rahav Meir in preparation for Yom Haatzmaut

11:10-12:00 To Dwell in the Palace
Mrs. Tzivia Ehrlich-Klein

12:05-1:00 Yaakov's Open Tent: the Zionist Admor of Tel Aviv
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9:00 AM

**S. Y. Agnon's Fable of the Goat:
A Modern Midrash for Medinat Yisrael**

Rabbi Shimshon Nadel

[Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/6878683646](https://zoom.us/j/6878683646)

[Zoom ID: 6878683646](https://zoom.us/j/6878683646)

10:15 AM

Women and the IDF – Mitzva or Minefield?

Rabbi Anthony Manning

[Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/460662359](https://zoom.us/j/460662359)

[Zoom ID: 460662359](https://zoom.us/j/460662359)

11:30 AM

Moving from Galut to Geula

Rabbi Alan Kimche

[Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/772450422](https://zoom.us/j/772450422)

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SUN, APRIL 26

9:00 AM

Rabbi David Walk

Tehillim – Divine Poetry

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Zoom ID: 92253147141

10:15 AM

Rabbi Aharon Adler

Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/403831319>

Zoom ID: 403831319

2:00 PM

Rabbi Jeffrey Bienenfeld

Men's Gemara Chabura with
Rabbi Jeffrey Bienenfeld

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MON, APRIL 27

9:15 AM

Mrs. Pearl Borow

Sefer Daniel (L'Ayla)

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10:30 AM

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

Chasidut on the Parsha

Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/700303855>

Zoom ID: 700303855

7:00 PM

Rabbi Baruch Taub

Parshat HaShavua

Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/888974573>

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9:00 PM

Rabbi Sam Shor

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9:15 AM

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Torah Tapestries

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10:15 AM

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin

Parshat HaShavua

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2:00 PM

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Bienenfeld**

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YOM HAATZMAUT

9:00 AM

Rabbi Shimshon Nadel

Halacha and Medina - S. Y.

Agnon's Fable of the Goat: A

Modern Midrash for Medinat

Yisrael. Zoom link: [https://zoom.](https://zoom.us/j/6878683646)

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10:15 AM

Rabbi Anthony Manning

Contemporary Issues in Halacha

and Hashkafa - Women and the

IDF – Mitzva or Minefield?

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11:30 AM

Rabbi Alan Kimche

Great Jewish Thinkers – Moving

from Galut to Geula

Zoom link: [https://zoom.](https://zoom.us/j/772450422)

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8:30 PM

Rabbi Ezra Friedman

Practical Kashrut

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Zoom ID: 698124792



THURS, APRIL 30

10:15 AM

Rabbi Baruch Taub

Parshat HaShavua

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11:30 AM

Rabbi Shai Finkelstein

Unlocking the Messages of

Chazal

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2:00 PM

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Rabbi Jeffrey Bienenfeld

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8:00 PM

Rabbi Ari Kahn

Parshat HaShavua

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Tuesday, April 28,

12:30 PM

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7:30 PM

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On the Power of Speech

The parshi'ot of Tazria and Metzora treat of the one afflicted with Tzara'at, an ailment that arises on account of Lashon Hara and that can only be cured by a Kohen who represents the epitome of purity and virtuous speech. For is it not written: "For the Kohen's lips should preserve knowledge/and they should seek the law at his mouth/for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts" (Malachi 2:7).

The person afflicted with Tzara'at is excommunicated from the camp and has to remain in isolation for seven days, after which the Kohen checks the status of the affliction. Doesn't this sound familiar in these times when we are in self-imposed seclusion or, worse still, in quarantine with the Coronavirus?

Our rabbis teach us that the individual is removed from society to contemplate his wrong-doing and to prevent further idle chatter. Tzara'at, in effect, is a spiritual malaise. It indicates that the sufferer exhibited a total lack of sensitivity to the needs of others and failed to perceive the malevolent impact of his gossip on the wider society.

The Midrash records that Moshe resisted taking Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim because, on account of the Hebrew who snitched on him for smiting the Egyptian taskmaster, he claimed that if Jews were prepared to prattle, they were not worthy of being saved. Hashem causes Moshe's hand to turn to leprosy and then retracts that condition, thus to indicate that the times had changed and that the people were no longer guilty of Lashon Hara: They were now worthy to be redeemed...

We can learn from this incident. When we look around, we see rife among politicians; we see character defamation and slanderous talk; we see accusations bandied about; we hear foul language in the highest of places. We ourselves, perhaps, have been quick to judge others, to stigmatize, and to point fingers.

Now, in our isolation, we have time to contemplate and reflect. We have time to consider how best to exercise the power of speech with which we have been endowed. Let us remember that one word can destroy and that one word can galvanize a whole nation. The choice is ours, thus to make ourselves worthy of the Ge'ulah – speedily and in our days. ■

Shabbat Shalom!

Menachem Persoff

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FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

RAV DANIEL MANN



Consequence of Removal of Sleeve from under Tefillin

Question: When after fastening the *tefillin shel yad*, I find part of my sleeve under the *tefillin* and pull it away, must I refasten the *tefillin* due to the rule of *ta'aseh v'lo min ha'asuy* (= *tvlmh* – *mitzva*-related actions must be performed directly)? In this case, the placement of the *tefillin* becomes proper not by fastening them but by removing something else!

Answer: Let us start by citing cases of *tvlmh* found in Shas. If one “forms” a *sukka* by hollowing out a pile in a way that leaves *sukka*-kosher objects over the space, the *sukka* is *pasul* until moving

the *s'chach*. One needs to positively place *s'chach* over an area (Sukka 12a). If the *tzitzit* of a garment are attached before it is obligated in *tzitzit*, the *tzitzit* must be reattached (Menachot 40b). *Mezuzot* must be placed on an obligated doorpost and not placed on a board which later helps form such a doorpost (ibid. 33b). The *gemara* raises the possibility that *tvlmh* applies to *hadasim* connected to a *lulav* when they were invalid and remain after they were fixed (Sukka 33b).

There are some grounds to compare our case to the Talmudic cases. We will see if there are distinctions that would justify the apparent practice that people do not refasten the *tefillin* after removing the sleeve. First, we note that the *gemara* and *Rishonim* do not discuss *tvlmh* in regard to *tefillin*. Some say (see discussions in Levushei Mordechai, Yoreh Deah II:122 and Shevet Halevi II:154) that *tvlmh* applies specifically to *mitzvot* for which the Torah uses the root *aso* (do/make), i.e., *sukka* and *tzitzit*. Some explain that *mezuzah* is only Rabbinical (opinion in Sdei Chemed, vol. V, p. 330) or a loose use of the term (Levushei Mordechai *ibid.*); *lulav* is unclear and might be because of its connection to *sukka*. This might (see later) remove the whole question.

Rav Frank (Har Tzvi, OC 23) uses the following convincing thesis about the

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mitzva of *tefillin* to rule leniently in your case. The *mitzva* of *tefillin* relates to the state of having *tefillin* on oneself, not to the act of putting it on, and therefore, for example, a non-Jew can put the *tefillin* on an infirmed person. Similarly, he says, *tvlmh* cannot be a problem if we do not care how the *tefillin* got there.

The Shevet Halevi (ibid.) points out that the classic *tvlmh* sources refer to preparing various *mitzva* objects (*sukka*, garment with *tzitzit*), not to the performance of the *mitzva*. One could use that distinction to negate any problem of *tvlmh* regarding fastening, but he argues that the need for direct action regarding the actual fulfillment of the *mitzva* is broader than the issue of *tvlmh*. However, the Shevet Halevi posits that just like when *tvlmh* disqualifies *s'chach*, this is remedied by shaking the *s'chach* (Sukka 15a), removing the *chatzitza* to fix the *tefillin's* position is positive "doing." The Eshel Avraham (Butchach), 27:4 said this before him.

Other opinions lend room for leniency. The Rashba (Megilla 24b) says that a sleeve under *tefillin shel yad* is not a matter of *chatzitza*; rather, *tefillin* should be under a covering rather than on top of it because it is "a sign for you" (Shemot 13:9). Therefore, says Rav Frank (ibid.), the fastening was not intrinsically flawed,

and when the "side problem" is solved, one does not need a new action. A precedent for this concept is the Rama (OC 626:2) – a *sukka* under a *pasul* overhang becomes kosher when the overhang is removed without further action because external problems do not create *tvlmh* problems.

Also, perhaps a *chatzitza* on a minority of the place of the *tefillin* does not disqualify (Eshel Avraham ibid. considers it a possibility). If that opinion is correct (although we do not rely upon it *l'chatchila*), the whole question disappears. Perhaps even if one does not fulfill the *mitzva* with a partial *chatzitza*, fastening it in that way is at least considered a *mitzva* action.

Because there are so many possible reasons for leniency, and several of them are strong reasons that negate the problem, there is no need in practice to refasten the *tefillin shel yad* after the sleeve is rolled back. ■

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RABBI GIDEON

Machon Puah for Fertility and
Gynecology in Accordance with Halacha

WEITZMAN

Keeping Safe

In the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic PUAH received a barrage of questions some of which we discussed last week. Couples who had embarked on treatment asked us whether they should stop the treatment in the middle, continue and potentially expose themselves to the virus or create embryos and freeze them instead of transferring them back into the uterus.

While these questions may not seem as crucial as some of the other dilemmas raised by this pandemic, for a couple undergoing fertility treatment these are far from trivial issues. The couple has lived with the tension and pain of fertility for years, has invested time, money and emotional effort in fertility treatment. This may be their first attempt, but it

could be their last hope of ever achieving a pregnancy.

While no one wants to endanger themselves, couples experiencing fertility are sometimes willing to go to great lengths to get pregnant and have children. We have heard many heart-wrenching questions from couples facing the difficult choice of undergoing treatment or giving up hope of having a baby. Since no one knows how long this will continue, for some this may mean that they will never have their own children.

These are difficult times and they require a special type of empathy and sensitivity to others

At PUAH we faced another problem;



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since we supervise all fertility treatments we would have to place supervisors in clinics, potentially exposing them to danger. In Israel, two supervisors had to go into quarantine when one of the medical staff in a clinic was found to have Coronavirus. They are well but it proved the prospective risk.

We made a decision that as long as couples are undergoing treatment and clinics are working then the supervision will continue while taking the appropriate precautions. When the fertility associations recommended the cessation of operations for all fertility clinics, we followed suit and advised the supervisors to stay home.

These are difficult times and they require a special type of empathy and sensitivity to others and other people's pain and suffering. For someone who has children fertility treatment may seem unnecessary, but for a couple undergoing years of suffering treatment may be essential and vital.

Our prayers are that this plague be erased very quickly from the entire world, but the whole time that it continues PUAH remains available to answer people's difficult and painful questions and to try to offer the best possible solutions. ■

The Puah Institute is based in Jerusalem and helps couples from all over the world who are experiencing fertility problems.

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MIDEI CHODESH

B'CHADSHO

BY RABBI SHMUEL GOLDIN
Faculty, OU Israel

An Omer Mystery

Everyone loves a mystery.

I would therefore like to suggest one for consideration during your hours of *bidud* (or semi-*bidud*, as the case may be). Rooted at a critical historical juncture of our nation's history, this mystery remains particularly relevant for us today.

First, some essential background information...

We find ourselves in the middle of the days of *Sefirat Ha'Omer*, the calendar period that stretches from the second day of Pesach until the festival of Shavuot. The Torah identifies this period as a time of *Sefira*, counting; featuring a specific mitzva to verbally count each day. No rationale, however, is openly given in the text as to why this count must be performed. Confronted with the Torah's

apparent silence on the matter; classical and contemporary scholars offer a wide variety of approaches to the obligation of *Sefirat Ha'Omer*. Each of these approaches lends a unique, significant aura to this critical calendar period.

Many scholars perceive the mitzva of *Sefirat Ha'Omer* as an act of philosophical linkage between Pesach and Shavuot; the holidays marking the two essential components in the birth of the Jewish Nation. Through the act of counting, we yearly proclaim that the Sinaitic Revelation, coinciding with Shavuot, grants essential meaning and purpose to the physical freedom achieved on Pesach. Through the eyes of these authorities, the *Omer* period becomes a *time of anticipation*, as each year we reexperience the Israelites' historic march towards their fateful encounter with God at Sinai.

Other authorities choose to view the days between Pesach and Shavuot



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primarily as a period of “purification from” rather than “anticipation toward.” By the time of the Exodus, these scholars maintain, the Israelites have been defiled by centuries of immersion in Egyptian society and culture. Numerous sources, in fact, indicate that the Hebrew slaves were on the verge of becoming irredeemable. With haste, at the last moment, God pulls the nation back from the brink. The newly freed slaves, however, must now undergo a process of purification before they can encounter God and receive the Torah at Sinai. Forty-nine days – one to counter each level of defilement experienced – must elapse before Revelation can take place. For these scholars, the days of the *Omer* are thus to be primarily seen as a yearly period of *personal reflection and refinement*.

**It was Rabbi Akiva, himself,
who famously proclaimed
V’ahavta l’reiacha kamocho...
as the most important
principle of the Torah**

In stark contrast to the opinions cited above, yet other scholars emphasize the agricultural, rather than the historical, dimension of the *Omer* period. Opening the yearly harvest season, the days of the *Omer* stretch from the beginning of the barley harvest (marked on the holiday of Pesach) to the beginning of the wheat harvest (marked on the holiday of Shavuot). The Hebrew term, *Omer*, in fact, directly refers

to the offering of barley that opened this period in Temple times and served as the *matir*, the “allowing ritual,” permitting the consumption of the year’s new crop. In this vein, a number of authorities see these days primarily as *a time of thanksgiving for past bounty and prayer for future success*. Others emphasize the *fundamental connection drawn during this period between the physical and spiritual dimensions of our lives*.

These and other approaches underscore the many positive messages potentially emerging from the critical days between Pesach and Shavuot.

Everything changes, however, during the first to second centuries CE, when a powerful tragedy dramatically transforms the days of the *Omer* into a *period of sorrow and mourning*. At that historical juncture, the Talmud relates, Rabbi Akiva’s twelve thousand pairs of students perish during the days between Pesach and Shavuot... *because they fail to treat each other with respect*.

The correspondence of this tragedy to the *Omer* period is hardly coincidental. As devastating as the loss of Rabbi Akiva’s

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students was on a human level, the potential ramifications of their deaths ran much deeper. Occurring at the vulnerable juncture following the destruction of the Second Temple; their loss represented a break in the chain of oral tradition; threatening the legacy of Sinai and the very survival of the Jewish nation. Only Rabbi Akiva's success in finding and teaching new students "in the South," ultimately mitigated the calamitous effects of this tragedy.

In commemoration of these events, the rabbis ordained that a portion of the *Omer* period be circumscribed by laws of mourning. Marriages and other festive celebrations as well as haircuts are proscribed during the restricted period, the exact computation of which varies according to custom, from community to community.

Which brings us back to our mystery [And I bet you thought that I was just using that intro to lure you into reading an analysis of *Sefirat Ha'Omer*...].

Not only did the death of Rabbi Akiva's students threaten the legacy of Sinai; but

the reported cause of their death, their own behavior, refuted the crux of that legacy. It was Rabbi Akiva, himself, who famously proclaimed *V'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*, "love for your fellow as for yourself," as the most important principle of the Torah. By failing to treat each other with respect, the students of this great sage negated their mentor's central teaching and contradicted the very Torah to which they otherwise dedicated their lives.

How could it be?

How could it be that one of our greatest sages failed to impart his central belief to his students?

The problem would be less glaring had Rabbi Akiva's students perished as a result of any other sin. But to transgress the very precept that serves as the core of their mentor's beliefs ...

How could it be?

Perhaps the issue is one of chronology. We do not know when Rabbi Akiva determined the centrality of the mitzva of *V'ahavta*. Perhaps he reached this

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realization only in sorrowful retrospect, as a result of the tragic loss of his students. Perhaps it is precisely their death that led their mentor to recognize the emptiness of Torah observance absent a foundation of interpersonal respect.

I would like, however, to suggest another possibility. Could it be that Rabbi Akiva believed his core belief to be so obvious, so self-evident and understood, that he failed to explicitly teach that belief to his students? If so, Rabbi Akiva's experience with his students may well reflect a prevalent failing in the intergenerational transmission of thoughts and ideas.

We often make the mistake of assuming that just because something is vital to us, it will automatically be of importance to our children – that the ideas and beliefs that lie at the heart of our worldviews are so obvious, they need not be openly stated and taught.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Our children and grandchildren grow up in worlds vastly different from our own, within which they form their own personal convictions. The basic foundations central to our lives are not automatically “givens” within theirs. The events, personalities and milestones that shaped the core of our worldviews are absent from their experience. I sharply remember the shock I experienced a few years ago when a congregant commented to me, prior to *Yom HaShoah*. “Do you realize, Rabbi, that children born today will be as temporally distant from the Shoah at the time of their bar/bat mitzva as we were at that age from

the Civil War?” The Civil War? Ancient history for today's Americans! Is that, indeed, how future generations will so quickly relate to the Shoah?

Perhaps not by chance, three critical days; *Yom HaShoah*, *Yom HaZikaron* and *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*; fall yearly during the Omer. The deep connection that we feel towards these occasions—a product of our own life experiences and the experiences of our parents and grandparents—will not automatically develop in the hearts of our progeny. No better year than this year, then, when much of the fanfare surrounding these days will be absent, to take the time (even through zoom or facetime) to clearly explain to our children and grandchildren what these days and the events they represent mean to us, and what they might mean to them.

A final potential lesson, then, from the Omer. Perhaps Rabbi Akiva failed to teach his students the central value of his worldview precisely because he considered that value to be self-evident. And just perhaps, across the centuries, he teaches us not to make the same mistake. As we strive to convey critical ideas and principles to future generations, we can make no assumptions of prior knowledge and conviction. We must consciously and actively teach each and every one of the ideas and principles we feel important, through open discussion and deed. ■

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin's Dvar Torah is featured each month marking the new Hebrew month on Shabbat Mevarchim Hachodesh.



RABBI EPHRAIM

SPRECHER

Faculty, OU Israel Center

Serving God In Joy Despite Corona

King David tells us in Tehillim 100, “Serve G-d with Joy.” How is it possible when we are surrounded by a deadly invisible enemy called CORONA?

Rambam provides the solution - the Fear of Gd. When someone fears Gd, he serves Him in joy. As it says, “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright of heart.” (Tehillim 97:11) A person derives happiness from serving Gd.

Yet, if someone’s entire focus in this world is just family, physical pleasure and acquiring possessions, then, if Gd forbid, tragedy strikes, he will plunge into despair, depression and overwhelming grief like Iyov.

In “The Guide of the Perplexed”, Rambam devotes two chapters to Iyov. In verses 3:22-23 of Iyov, Iyov’s friends try to calm him down, but in vain. However, by the end of the book Iyov is calmed down. What change has he undergone? Have his troubles ceased? No! Not at all!

His troubles are still with him, but his relationship to them has changed.

At the beginning of the book, “Iyov sits among the ashes” (2:8). In other words, he is enveloped in earthly concerns. Yes, he is righteous, but materialism and physical possessions are very important to him. Suddenly his world collapses, when his wealth is lost, and his children die, and he becomes afflicted with a painful skin disease. He becomes deeply depressed and broken in spirit.

Later on, however, Iyov says, “I abhor and regret dust and ashes” (4:26) by which he means, “I reject my entire enslavement to worldly concerns.”

Ralbag, as well, writes in his commentary on Iyov, that all the troubles that befall a person only cause worry and ruin when he is focused on and locked into materialism. If, however, one’s world is spiritual, then troubles cannot harm him, for a person’s spiritual world is always under his control. In every situation, one has the free choice to do good, whether one is healthy or sick, rich or poor, married with children or alone and childless. Circumstances change, but for every situation there is an appropriate way to serve G-d. If someone’s joy derives from serving Gd, it will never be possible to take it away from him!

Therefore, Rambam writes, “If your thoughts are focused only on this physical world, then there is no solution for your problem, because this world is no paradise.”

The righteous person who finds pleasure in mitzvot and good deeds, stands strong and erect in every situation, facing up to all problems. He does not take to heart difficulties arising from the problems in this world. He has a correct perspective on reality.

Even if someone possesses wealth and health, that is not a guarantee of contentment, says Rambam, because it will all be gone when the person dies. “When he dies, he shall carry nothing away. His glory shall not descend with him.” (Tehillim 49:18)

Rambam states that when a righteous person suffers, he takes solace in the fact that even such a life is better than death. The main thing is that he is alive. Even at his death he delivers his soul back to G-d joyfully, knowing that even death is all for the best, because it leads one to eternal life in the World to Come. Death is the door which leads to a better world without pain and suffering.

Rambam comments regarding the Mishnah, “A person is obligated to bless Gd for evil that occurs, just as much as for the good”. (Brachot 54a) The Rambam in Perush Hamishnayot explains this teaching as meaning that one can never know if the evil isn't really a concealed good, and the good isn't really a concealed evil.



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Well known are the Talmudic teachings, “This too, is for the best” as well as, “Whatever Gd does, He does for the best”. There can be a person who loses his wealth and paradoxically this becomes the cause of his contentment. In losing all his wealth and status, he might gain a tranquil life, and even dedicate it to serving Gd, thereby meriting the World to Come.

The Midrash tells about a man walking along the road to the seaport to catch a ship for an important journey. A thorn got stuck in his foot. Because he now limped, he missed his ship’s departure. The man cursed, but the ship sank. This is what Isaiah (12:1) means when he says, “I will thank G-d for being angry with me.”

Rambam makes a fundamental point, that the bounties of this world are secondary and are not our main goal. He also reminds us that we do not know what tomorrow will bring. In this world, good and evil, can each be transformed into the other.

Rambam concluded that there are two possible causes of worry, the past and the future. A person worries about what was and what will be. Rambam writes, “Worrying about the past, has no benefit and someone who sighs and frets over something that has already passed, is senseless and foolish. Bad enough that such a person once had a problem, but he makes things worse by worrying about it after it has passed and gone.” (Guide for the Perplexed)

As for worrying about future troubles,

that too, says Rambam is nonsense. It is possible that the trouble will come, and it is possible that the trouble will never come. One should gladden his heart with trust in Gd. Gd is all good, and whatever He sends a person is only for the best, even though we don’t always understand why or how.

Rav Soloveitchik asks what the difference between a slave and a free person is. “A slave, the Rav says, thinks only of himself. A free person has the ability to think of others.”

Our goal is to be sensitive to the needs of society and to be free means to be helpful and considerate of others. In this context, CORONA has caused us to show sensitivity to the elderly and vulnerable populations. All of us are self-isolating in our homes not just because we are afraid of being infected, but mainly because being outdoors endangers other people. This demonstrates incredible consideration and regard for the elderly and vulnerable populations and this is one of the signs of our being truly free, according to Rav Soloveitchik.

Just as the CORONA epidemic began with only one person and spread to the entire world, so too, the good we do has an effect on the entire world. CORONA demonstrates that individuals have tremendous influence over the whole world. This influence can be used for good, or it can be used for evil. All of us have a unique and special mission in life to change the world for the better, ONE good deed at a time! ■



Speech in the Land of Israel

כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם לְאֶחְזָה וְנִתְּתִי נֹגַע צָרַעַת בְּבֵית אֶרֶץ אֶחְזָתְכֶם.

When you come into the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as a possession, and I put the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession. (Lev. 14:34)

Take a look at the history of the Jewish people and you will see that speech and exile are intertwined. The connection traces back to the dawn of history, in the Garden of Eden. The serpent speaks *lashon hara* about God Himself and tells Eve untruths about Him. (“And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will surely not die for God knows that on the day that you eat thereof, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like angels, knowing good and evil.’”) Adam and Eve believed the serpent, sinned, and were punished with exile from the Garden of Eden.

Later in Genesis, Joseph tells his father Jacob *lashon hara* about his brothers: “And Joseph brought evil tales about them to their father.” The outcome was exile to Egypt. In the wilderness, the spies spoke badly about the Land of Israel, saying that it is a difficult and bad land, “a land that

consumes its inhabitants.” The punishment was forty years of wandering in the wilderness en route to the Land of Israel. Our sages teach that the Davidic kingdom was broken up because of strife and *lashon hara* among King David’s soldiers and once again we were sent into exile. From all these examples, we have to realize that a society’s resilience is vital to its survival. If members of a society curse, shame, and gossip about co-members, then there is no future for this society and it will eventually disintegrate.

The correct use of speech is our entry code into the Land of Israel. Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook said that after the long two-thousand-year exile, we needed to return to the Land of Israel and correct our way of speaking. Therefore, in the generation prior to our return and the Ingathering of Exiles, God sent us the Hafetz Hayim to instill in us the awareness of not speaking *lashon hara* and the importance of correct speech. Perfect historical timing! Just before we returned to the Land of Israel, we were given the tools to speak correctly and be worthy of returning. ■

Sivan Rahav-Meir is an Israeli journalist, currently on shlichut of World Mizrahi movement to the US. She is the author of #Parasha (Menorah Press) and Reaching to Heaven (Artscroll). To receive her daily insight on the portion of the week, text your name to: 972-58-679-9000



CHIZUK & IDUD

for Olim & Not-yet-Olim

BY RABBI YERACHMIEL RONESS

Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh

In this week's Parasha we read of the mitzvah of Brit Milah on the eighth day.

The Biblical origins of this Mitzva were rather different. Avraham, who was the first to enter into this covenant with G-d did so at a very advanced age. For Avraham this was a sacrificial show of devotion which necessitated a number of days of rest and recuperation in its wake. [Interestingly, the Rambam stresses the fact that today we follow this mitzvah not because of the command given to Avraham, but rather because we are thus commanded by the Torah given on Sinai (Peirush Hamishnah, Chulin 7:6)].

Nonetheless, those acquainted with the story of the Olim who came to Israel from communist countries in the 1980's, are well aware of the fact that the original Avrahamic experience is not unknown in modern times as well. These adult, often elderly, Olim who had been unable to perform the mitzvah in their birth lands, underwent this procedure upon making Aliyah, often at a sensitive time in their lives. I vividly recall one such occasion, close to thirty years ago, when I had the merit of witnessing four Olim, a father with his three sons, aged 4-18, as they prepared together for their circumcision. Following in the footsteps of their forefather Avraham, they bravely entered,

one after the other, into an operation room in Shaarei Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem. Their thoughts during those moments echoed the reply I remember hearing on another such occasion from a thirty year old Oleh who found himself in similar circumstances. Having approached a Rav asking for a Brit Milah, this fellow was asked why he was so insistent. His simple reply said it all: "I am a Jew and now I can finally exercise my Jewish right". The mitzvah, the "brit kodesh", is a sign of the Jewish People's holy covenant with G-d, and in this specific case, I remember the difficulties inherent in proving that this individual was indeed halachically Jewish. When asked if he spoke Yiddish, he replied that although he did not, his mother did so fluently. Conversing with his mother a short while later (In Yiddish!) she told me how this young man, known as Leonid was really called Aryeh-Leib. When I asked her if she knew why her son had approached the Rabbinat she replied in no uncertain terms that she did, adding that she believed this was wholly unnecessary and that her son was a "meshuganeh". I remember thinking in

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jest that this was clear proof that she was indeed a "yiddishe mama" who could not see beyond her only son's physical well-being...

They wish to live as citizens of the world whereas coming to live in Israel would separate them from their fellow-man

The Midrash (B. Rabbah 48:9) on the verses in Breishit tells us that when Avraham first heard of the divine command he too trembled in fear. However, he was not concerned of his physical wellbeing. The Midrash suggests that Avraham's main concern was lest the Brit Mila set him apart from all other men, thereby preventing him from being able to have an affect upon them.

According to the Midrash, G-d reassured him by saying that not only would others continue to enter his tent, but from now on, the Almighty together with his entire entourage would enter there as well.

It seems that Avraham's concerns are mirrored by many Jews today. Although

they are proud of their Jewish identity they are always wary of being branded as the "other", wishing to be cosmopolitan members of the universe. This dichotomy between universalism and particularism leads many to remain in Galut. They wish to live as citizens of the world whereas coming to live in Israel would separate them from their fellow-man. They have not fully internalized the message G-d taught Avraham by linking the covenant to be the God of Abraham's seed with the promise to give the Holy Land to his children (Bereishit 17, 7-8):

"And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee... And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land... of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.'

If we are truly Abraham's seed then our place is here - if we are not here then are we truly his seed?

Only by coming to live in the Holy Land and strengthening our connection with the Creator of the Universe can we become true Universalists affecting the rest of mankind. ■



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FROM THE SCHOOL OF THE RAMCHAL

BY JACOB SOLOMON

It is the plague of tzaraat. The Kohen shall examine him and pronounce him tameh (13:3).

Most of the parasha is about the plague of tzaraat. R. Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that tzaraat is not leprosy as we understand it, but G-d's indicating His disapproval to an individual about the way he or she is carrying on. The Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzva 168) explains:

"To fix in our souls that G-d is watching each and every human being... including the smallest details, and likewise it is with a sufferer of tzaraat during the days of his confinement. If he repents, then purifying signs will appear and he will be healed. If he does not repent, then the opposite will happen."

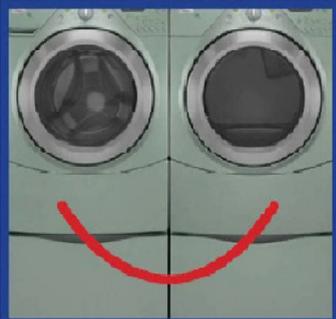
Extending this idea, tzaraat is not so much a punishment, as a warning from the Almighty. As Moshe said to the B'nei

Yisrael before his death: Like a father who chastises his son, so... G-d chastises you (D'varim 8:5). Out of love, so that the child learns from his or her wrongdoings and mistakes. And we are all G-d's children.

Indeed, the Kitvei Ramad Vali (R. Moshe David Vali, student of the Ramchal) explains that common to all forms of tzaraat is the spiritual current of Chesed, kindness, and this Chesed is on two levels.

Firstly, G-d brings suffering on individuals so that they may reflect on their past behavior and correct those faulty character traits for the future. This is a Chesed. It is a sign that G-d has not rejected the individual, but is working with him or her on a One-to-one basis. That involves isolating the individual from the community for the period of his tzaraat, which gives the time to think and commit oneself to a new start. The person's mandatory exclusion from

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contact with others until the tzaraat has healed will give ample time to reflect and to resolve to behave suitably in the future.

Secondly, the individual with tzaraat "should be brought to Aharon the Kohen or to one of his sons, the Kohanim" (13:2). The spiritual root of Kehuna is Chesed, rooted in Aharon himself as the person who "loved peace, pursued peace, loved people, and brought them close to the Torah" (Avot 1:12). It would be the Kohen who would declare him tameh. For his symptoms indicate that his tendency to gossip or act haughtily in public (Arachin 16a) would make society more peaceful if he or she would be out of the way for the time being. In short, a Chesed to the community. It would also be the Kohen who, on examining the now-faded symptoms as a Divine expression of accepting the person's repentance, who would effect the re-entry of the individual back into society as a less contentious individual. In short, a Chesed to that person.

Perhaps today's equivalent is situations when series of things inexplicably seem to go wrong, one after the other, which may become increasingly embarrassing as people get to hear all about it. A person should consider that it is G-d's wake up call to pay attention to a character flaw and improve attitude and behavior towards others. "When unpleasant things happen, consider carefully your own behavior" (B'rachot 5a). As it says: "Let us search and examine our ways and return to G-d" (Eicha 3:40). ■



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THE NEW OLD PATH

BY RABBI BENJI LEVY

CEO Of Mosaic United

Pleasure is in the Eye of the Beholder

It is always interesting to note how two people can see the exact same thing in two completely different ways. The State of Israel, for example, has differing religious meanings for different groups of Jews. Some, such as the Neturei Karta group, are categorically opposed to the establishment and existence of the State of Israel, believing that it is slowing down the ultimate redemption by the Messiah. On the other hand, there are religious Zionists who believe that the State of Israel is a miraculous gift from God, that it is the beginning of the redemptive process and constitutes the fulfilment of biblical prophecies. Yet these directly opposing perspectives are based on the same historical facts and presented through the same religious texts. Similarly, if two people gaze at an object, one from the front and one from the back, they can have two very diverse perspectives on what it looks like, though they are looking at the same object. And of course, each individual's own preconceptions and experiences come into play when they

interpret the meaning of a particular event or object.

The Talmud describes two different types of guests, one good and one bad:

What does a good guest say? How much trouble did the host go to for me! How much meat and wine, and how many rolls he brought before me, and all the trouble that he went to was only for me. But what does the bad guest say? What trouble did the host go to? I ate only one piece of bread and drank one cup of wine, and all the trouble that he went to was only for his wife and children (Talmud Bavli, Tractate Berachot 58a).

Two guests of the same host can choose to see the same experience in completely different ways. Their choices, according to the Talmud, do not reflect on the host, but rather they define the guest. This phenomenon is alluded to by the Torah when describing the effects of *tzaraat* (commonly translated as leprosy), a physical manifestation of a spiritual illness. In contrast to a regular skin condition, which is present on the outside of the body, this condition is described as being 'in the person' (*Lev. 13:9*). The Talmud isolates seven different potential causes for this disease, the best known of which are slander and improper speech, or *lashon hara* (Talmud Bavli, Tractate

Arachin 15b). However, another cause, according to the Talmud, is *tzarut ayin*, or narrow-sightedness – seeing the negative in a given situation or person (Talmud Bavli, Tractate *Arachin* 16a).

This conveys the strength of an individual's attitude in the transformation of a situation

When describing *tzaraat*, the Torah repeatedly uses the term *nega*, meaning affliction. Interestingly, the term *nega* is an anagram comprised of the very same letters as its direct opposite – *oneg* – meaning pleasure. An ancient book of Jewish mysticism states that: ‘There is no good higher than *oneg* and no evil lower than *nega*’ (*Sefer Yetzira* 2:7). Both words contain the letters *nun* and *gimmel* next to one another; the only difference is the positioning of the letter *ayin*. In addition to being a letter, the word *ayin* means ‘eye’. Based on an inference quoted in the *Sefat Emet* one can extrapolate a deeper meaning within these Hebrew words. Depending on where it is placed, the *ayin* (eye) can transform the other two letters from meaning an affliction, to meaning pleasure. In life, our experience of any given situation can be entirely altered by the unique lens through which we perceive it. When we look through a negative lens, we will see a *nega* – a painful affliction. But if we move our eye to look on the bright side, the same situation can take on a positive transformation.

At the conclusion of its description of

the *tzaraat* affliction, the Torah states that the final way that the priest should assess whether or not an affliction is considered *tzaraat* is to check if the *nega* has ‘transformed its *ayin* (eye)’ (*Lev.* 13:55). This cryptic verse now makes perfect sense – the only remedy for the malady of narrow-sightedness is to shift one’s paradigm and look through a different lens. The Mishna states about this disease: ‘Even if [the afflicted one is] a Torah scholar who believes with certainty that the affliction exists, he should not render [negative] judgement with a definitive statement’ (Mishna, Tractate *Nega'im* 12:5, based on *Lev.* 14:35). The reason for this law is that one should learn to admit, with humility, the limitations of one’s own knowledge – for only God knows for certain the real meaning behind a situation (*Mizrachi* on *Lev.* 14:35). The *Tosefot Yom Tov* takes this one stage further and states that by branding something as destructive or negative, one ensures that it will become so. This conveys the strength of an individual’s attitude in the transformation of a situation.

If we look for the bad in life, it will always be found. Declaring a situation as doomed can generate a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, if we search hard enough and look at the world through a positive lens, metaphorically positioning the *ayin* appropriately, then even something ostensibly bad can turn out to be good. ■

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TORAH 4 TEENS

BY TEENS

NCSY ISRAEL



Elana Phillips
Modiin
Chapter Director

Fighting The Challenge Of Lashon Hara

We are constantly told we must not speak lashon hara. Although we know it's not the right thing to speak badly about others, we still constantly struggle to prevent ourselves from doing so. How can we overcome this challenge?

The Kli Yakar explains that the word מצורע is made up of two words מוצא רע. The word למצוא means to find, someone who speaks lashon hara manages to find the bad in people. In order to prevent ourselves from speaking badly about others we need to seek the good in one another rather than the bad. By finding and seeing the good in each other the challenge of lashon hara can be overcome since we are not looking at the negative, but rather the positive. In Tehilim Chapter 34 we are told 'Who is the man who desires life, who loves days to see goodness? guard your tongue

from evil and your lips from speaking deceitfully shun evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it'. According to this pasuk if you see goodness then you will guard your tongue. The pasuk is telling us that in order to love life we need to see the good rather than focusing on the negative, and once we change our mindset we can change our speech and overcome the challenge of lashon hara. This too is applicable to our struggle. In the hardships of the coronavirus, with all the pain and adversity it is still important to find and look for the good. ■



Liora Tolub
10th Grade,
Modiin

Quarantine Then And Now

This week's Parasha discusses the skin disease: tzaraat. A disease that affected people's belongings, clothes and skin – and made them impure.

Tzarrat was an expression of sinning – a sign from God that your behavior had to change. While everyone knows that the



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Tzaraat affected people who spoke Lashon Hara, the midrash explains that 10 sins could cause the disease – all anti-social sins – such as lying for selfish ends, false oaths, vanity, and slander.

The author of the Sefer Tur, explains that the power of words and behaviors is indeed contagious

There are many forms of impurity in Jewish law, and the usual purification processes include rituals such as immersing in a mikvah or offering a Korban. But the treatment of tzara'at was complete isolation.

While commentators argue about whether Tzaraat was a communicable disease, most agree that the isolation had nothing to do with contagion – in the sense we have now become very familiar with via the coronavirus pandemic. The Jews in isolation were not going to give Tzara'at to their neighbors. However, Rav Yaakov Ben Asher, the author of the Sefer Tur, explains that the power of words and behaviors is indeed contagious. The Maharal of Prague also explains that these social sins crumble society by moving people away from one another – and thus, it is only fitting that the punishment would be exile from that society. Negativity is contagious. We can influence others with our attitude towards life.

To become purified from these social sins, a ritual and spiritual protocol is not

enough – isolation is needed to change our characters. And the Torah teaches that the best method to achieve this makeover is by being alone, without any external distractions.

Isolation is terrible. Since the Purim holidays, we all have been isolated from one another. We are all now longing for the simple things that we used to take for granted, like going out for a walk or giving a friend a hug. And for the first time, many of us celebrated the Pesach Seder with our nuclear family, without grandparents, uncles, aunts or siblings. But the Torah teaches us, through this Parsha, that ultimately, a person is never alone. While we are in isolation, we can be more connected with our thoughts and feelings – and, most importantly, reflect on what kind of people we want to be. ■

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Upper-left: Birth of a baby boy <> knife for Mila <> birth of baby girl <> under each pix is the period in days of Tum'a and Tahara <> dove and lamb are korbanot of a Yoledet <> Eyeore, Winnie the Pooh's donkey friend, name pronounced very close to Iyar which is the month upon us <> NEGA on body (hand) <> and on garment <> lower-left, NEGA on house <> chameleon for the changing colors of Nega'm that guide the kohen in his determinations <> razor for shaving the metzora after his period of Tum'a <> two kosher birds but not eligible for the Altar (sparrows in this pix) are used in the purification process of the metzora <> as are the hyssop <> and cedar branch <> eyes with one eyebrow missing because

the metzora shaves all his body hair, including eyebrows (he hasn't finished yet) <> lamb with 2 + 1 is for the korban of the purified metzora <> Rav Kook, a kohein, with glasses, because of the many references to the kohein looking at the various blemishes to determine NEGA status <> 'pound sign' (has many other names, including - hash, number sign, tic tac toe, octothorpe) for the warp and woof of the weave of fabric (wool or linen) that can be afflicted <> traffic light because the colors of red, yellow, and green are all mentioned in the sedra <> right ear lobe, right thumb and right big toe are involved in blood and oil applications (old meaning of the word, no relationship to cellphone apps) of the purification process of the metzora <> lower-right side of the PP: TAZ - (nickname of the Looney Tunes Tasmanian devil) RHEA (large South American bird) MITZ (as in juice) ORA (of orange without the NGE) all spell out TAZRI'A M'TZORA <> and two Unexplaineds for your solution

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שמה נחיה חיינו, חיי עדת מי מנה.

(“האמונה” הרב אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק זצ”ל)

Forever there lives in our hearts the faithful belief to return to our Holy Land,
the city where King David resided.

There we will fulfill our destiny [in the place that] Avraham acquired.

There we will live our lives, the lives of the innumerable assembly.

(Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zt”l’s poem, “HaEmunah”)

Torah Tidbits This 'n That

Phil's page



Concerning Tzoraat and Corona

A number of weeks ago - but I don't know how many, because time has been distorted by the 'current situation' - I wrote about Social Distancing in Parshat Tazri'a. (Okay, I looked it up - TT1364 - but how long ago was that?)

Now, with Tazri'a-M'tzora being read this Shabbat, I would like to revisit the topic.

Tzoraat is NOT leprosy. That common misconception comes from the Greek word that is the root of leprosy but also refers to certain skin afflictions - which Tzoraat is.

I'm using Tzoraat and Nega'im interchangeably.

The many mitzvot related to Nega'im apply when we have Kohanim who are expert in determining what afflictions he will declare the person as TAMEI, or TAHOR, or require a week's quarantine or two weeks. This is different from most other mitzvot, which apply in all times, or in the time of the Beit HaMikdash, or other specific time designations. The applicability of the mitzvot of Tzoraat is less specific. But that will not concern us for now.

What will concern us is the idea that at certain periods of Jewish Life, there

was a physical manifestation of a spiritual defect in the afflicted person. What sin brought on Tzoraat? Our sources say that it usually was 'caused' by Lashon HaRa. Usually. Meaning there could have been other causes. The metzora was given ample time and counseling by a kohen to seriously repent and change his ways.

Which brings us to now - or any time that Tzoraat is not an active issue. We still have blemishes and burns and other health problems. We have tragedies that occur to individuals, and national or worldwide plagues, such as you know what.

The metzora was forbidden to shave or pluck the hairs from a nega. He was forbidden to remove signs of Tzoraat. To do so and chalk up his problems to chance, was sinful and prevented T'shuva and self-improvement. Even the metzora, as mentioned earlier, did not know for sure what brought on his affliction. But he had an agenda of introspection and T'shuva.

Not the same, but not far off, is our situations of personal maladies, injuries, tragedies and national and worldwide troubles - as mentioned above.

We certainly cannot know why something happens. But we dare not chalk it up to chance. We too have an agenda. Governments, health professionals, and scientists are working on the physical side; we must use our down time for serious introspection and self-improvement.



RABBI DAVID SAMSON

Torah Tidbits is proud to feature a teaching from Rabbi David Samson shli"ta. Rabbi Samson has written extensively on the thought of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook ztl and he has done pioneering work in the area of developing schools which address the needs of olim in Israel.

Coming Home

Many Orthodox Jews who have not (yet) joined their brethren in Israel, rely on the Rambam as their source that the G-d of Abraham, Joshua and King David approves of them staying on the banks of the Hudson and the Thames. A glance at the text of the Rambam will open our eyes to recognize that the Rambam not only mentions the personal mitzvah to live in Israel numerous times (Kings 5, 9; Ishut 13,19-20; Slaves 8,9; Shabbat 6,11) but he actually sees political Zionism as reason to recite Hallel!

But first let's ask, "What is the halachic atomic weight of the establishment of the State of Israel?"

The Ramban (Sefer Hamitzvot, Positive Commandments, 4) includes the mitzvah of establishing the Jewish State as one of the 613 basic precepts! That means

that a Torah true Jew has to not only keep Shabbat, tefillin and prayer, but must establish a state In Israel to serve as our national homeland. He states unequivocally "It is a mitzvah [to make sure] that the Land of Israel be under Jewish sovereignty and not under the sovereignty of any other nation."

Some people think that the establishment of the State of Israel is a hechsher mitzvah – a facilitator of a mitzvah enabling Jews to make Aliya. The Ramban however says the exact opposite." ... and it is my opinion that the mitzvah that Chazal so extol ... the mitzvah of living in Israel... is a part of the mitzvah to liberate and settle the Land." (ibid). Here he explains that political Zionism is actually the root and source of the individual's obligation to make Aliya!!! This means that if a person performs the mitzvah of making Aliya but believes in a separation of Synagogue and state- He doesn't go to the army or help resettle barren lands then this person is doing only a partial part of this mitzvah. The full mitzvah of living in Israel includes national involvement as well. That means that paying taxes, lobbying for annexation, and celebrating Israel's independence are not only part of this mitzvah but they are actually the greater part!

I would expect that meticulous Jews who invest in Shmura Matzah, perfect Etrogim,

and Tefillin with all of the trappings of Hidur Mitzvah would want to embrace this mitzvah as well and after making aliya celebrate Yom Haatzmaut Lechumra.

The Rambam teaches us that Jewish sovereignty has intrinsic value far beyond those individuals who happen to be at the helm

The Pitchei Tshuva (Even HaEzer 75:6) cites this Ramban and decrees that it is a Positive Torah Commandment. He adds "... And this is obvious from **all** of the Poskim, both Rishonim and Achronim!"

How can he say "all" - what about the Rambam?

The Rambam begins the Laws of Chanukah explaining why we celebrate and recite Hallel on Chanukah "...And [the Hashmonites] established a King from the priests and returned Jewish sovereignty to the Land for over two hundred years." Here we see an amazing insight into the intrinsic value of Jewish sovereignty as an absolute value irrelevant of who is the King and what is the nature of the Government. We have to remember that those two-hundred-years that we celebrate were populated by many antagonists to Orthodoxy and above all the arch villain King Herod who spent his reign killing orthodox Jews. Nevertheless, The Rambam teaches us that Jewish sovereignty has intrinsic

value far beyond those individuals who happen to be at the helm. Yes, we celebrate Chanukah today by saying Hallel, thanking G-d for our sovereignty even though it included many terrible dark times!

These are the Halachic underpinnings for the overwhelming understanding that this mitzvah is not just another mitzvah. When Chazal refer to the intrinsic value of this mitzvah, they explain that it is equal in value to all of the other mitzvot put together! (Sifri Riheh 80). Why? What is so special about Israeli statehood?

The Rambam paskens (Kings 12,2) "The only difference between this world and the Messianic era is Jewish Sovereignty". What can be clearer than that? Yom Haatzmaut is seen here by the Rambam not as a secular event but in effect the demarcation point defining the messianic era itself!

We celebrate not only the Aliya of millions of Jews, not only the mitzvah of establishing Jewish sovereignty, today we celebrate nothing short of the beginning of the messianic era. Wow!!! ■

Rabbi David Samson serves as the Rosh Yeshiva of Yerushalayim Torah Academy (www.yta.org.il). He is one of the leading English-speaking Torah scholars in the Religious Zionist movement in Israel and an educational entrepreneur. Rabbi Samson has written five books, most of which are on the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook and Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook.



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

Program Director, OU Israel Center

The *Parshiyot* of *Tazria* and *Metzora* focus primarily on the spiritual affliction of *tzaraat*, a mysterious rash or pock mark which can afflict one's skin, one's clothing or even the walls of one's home. Our *Chazal* suggested that this spiritual affliction is the result of *lashon hara*- inappropriate speech.

Tzaraat, as mentioned above, could appear on the walls of one's home. The *pasuk* states:

When you enter the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I inflict an outbreak upon a house in the land you possess...

Rashi, based on numerous *maamarei chazal* offers a rather surprising explanation of this verse:

*This was a good sign for them, because the Amorites concealed **treasures of gold** in the walls of their houses during the entire 40 years the Jewish People were in the wilderness in order that they might not possess them when they conquered the land. However, upon the appearance of this affliction, they would pull down the house and discover these treasures.*

In just a few days we will celebrate *Yom HaAtzmaut* and the incredible gift that is *Medinat Yisrael*. One of the great religious personalities of the pre-state *Yishuv* and

early years of *Medinat Yisrael*, was the *Ohalei Yaakov* of *Tel Aviv*, Rabbi Yaakov Friedman, zt'l, the *Admor of Husiyatin zy'a*. The Rebbe of *Husiyatin*, was fortunate to make *aliya* from Poland, just ahead of the Nazi onslaught, settling in *Tel Aviv* in 1938, where he lived until his passing in 1954.

In a stirring teaching from his first *Shabbat Tazria Metzora* in *Eretz Yisrael* in 1938, the Rebbe points to this particular *Rashi*, to offer his thoughts on both the burgeoning *Yishuv* in *Eretz Yisrael*, as well as how one should relate to both the building of a Jewish presence in *Artzeinu HaKedosha*, as well as those pioneers who might not be ritually observant. To paraphrase the Rebbe's powerful words:

“ And how should we relate to those among us who seem distant from our faith and tradition, who are engaged in building and working to establish Eretz Yisrael once again as the eternal home of the Jewish People? Indeed it might pain us to see their distance from our mesora, and our preference certainly would be that all those laboring to sustain the Jewish Yishuv here in Eretz Yisrael, did so with a fidelity to our

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tradition. However, our holy Torah teaches us that the Amorites left great treasures hidden within the walls of the structures they built here in Eretz Yisrael, that ultimately the Jewish People were able to find upon entering those homes. If this was true then, for homes built by the Amorites, then certainly the same must be true for homes being built in Eretz Yisrael by Jewish hands—there will be great treasures which will certainly be revealed!

...Our way of understanding is that we must appreciate the great merit of those who are actively working to build up our holy land, and our way is to partner in this enterprise, first and foremost because it is a great mitzva to do so! Furthermore, the only way that we might influence others, and return them to an appreciation for

the beauty of our tradition, is through love and unity—not through harsh words or arguments, and certainly not through any inappropriate speech, because after all, the Torah tells us that the afflictions affect our homes as a result of lashon hara! “

Yehi Ratzon, as we look forward to celebrating 72 years of Medinat Yisrael, during very challenging and uncertain times, may we take to heart this powerful teaching from the Rebbe of Husiyatin zy'a, and realize that the recipe for bringing an end to an affliction, and to revealing wondrous treasures, is to see beyond our differences, realize the sacred value of unity, and to use the Koach HaDibur to share messages of hope and love, and not chas v'shalom to utilize speech in a way that is harmful or divisive. ■

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Are Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim 'Halakhic' Holidays?

Following the miraculous birth of the State of Israel in 1948 and the dramatic reclamation of Jerusalem in 1967, the Chief Rabbinate, together with leading authorities, established Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim as full-fledged festivals, with the recitation of special Tefillot including Hallel.

The question, debated by many, was: *Is it permissible to add new holidays to the Jewish Calendar?*

According to Ramban, creating a new Jewish holiday violates the prohibition of "adding" to the commandments of the Torah (See his comments to Devarim 13:1).

But throughout Jewish History, communities and individuals who experienced a miraculous salvation established 'Purims,' a festival to be

celebrated like Purim in commemoration of the miracle.

In the 16th Century, the Jewish community of Lepanto (today Nafpaktos), Greece, established a holiday to give thanks to Hashem for sparing them from possible destruction. Members of the community inquired of Rav Moshe Alashkar if they could indeed establish a holiday, like Purim, to celebrate their miraculous salvation. They also inquired if this practice is binding on those no longer living in the community, and on future generations.

The Maharam Alashkar ruled that indeed community leaders have the authority to establish such a day, and it is binding upon members of the community, present and future (Teshuvot Maharam Alashkar, 49).

Rav Chizkiyah da Silva, however, was very upset with this practice. He criticized the Jewish communities in Greece and Egypt for establishing new holidays. He based his objection on Megillat Ta'anit, a list of 35 or 36 festivals observed during the Second Temple Period. On these dates, fasting and eulogies were prohibited. He cites a passage in the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 18b), which relates how following the destruction of the Temple, Megillat Ta'anit - together with all of the festivals described therein - becomes null

and void. Accordingly, he rules that neither a community, nor an individual, has the authority to declare new festivals today (Pri Chadash, OC 496:14).

Rav Moshe Sofer, the famed Chatam Sofer, defended the practice of instituting new holidays, and argued that even according to the opinion that Megillat Ta'anit is null and void, the holidays of Chanukah and Purim were never nullified. Accordingly, festivals created to commemorate a miraculous salvation, patterned after Chanukah and Purim, are indeed permissible (Teshuvot Chatam Sofer, OC 191). He concludes by noting how he and his teacher, Rav Natan Adler, were careful to observe 'Purim Frankfurt,' also known as 'Purim Vincenz,' even when no longer living in Frankfurt.

Elsewhere, Rav Sofer writes that establishing a festival to mark a miraculous event is a Biblical requirement, and one who does not do so is in violation of not performing a positive commandment (Teshuvot Chatam Sofer, YD 233).

Rav Avraham Danziger also rules that it is a mitzvah for an individual or a community to establish a holiday. He describes how he himself established a holiday on the day when he and his family were spared after a fire destroyed a number of homes including his own, claiming the lives of 31 people (Chayei Adam 155:41).

The Magen Avraham and Mishnah Berurah (OC 686) both record that a community can create a "Purim," for themselves and for future generations, on a day in which they experienced a miracle.

And over the centuries, tens of communities and families have established these 'Purims,' sometimes with the recitation of special prayers, meals, and sometimes even reading from a special Megillah, written to commemorate the event. (For an exhaustive list, see Yom Tov Levinski, "Purim Sheni," published in his Sefer Hamoadim, vol. 6, pp. 297-321).

Following the establishment of the State of Israel, the Chief Rabbinate, together with other leading authorities, looked to these precedents in establishing Yom Ha'atzmaut and later, Yom Yerushalayim, as religious holidays. One such authority, Rav Meshulam Roth, wrote that it is a "mitzvah" to celebrate Israel's Independence Day as a "joyous festival with the recitation of Hallel," marking the "miracle of our salvation and freedom" (Kol Mevaser 1:21).

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 94a) relates that King Chizkiyahu would have been made the Messiah, but for the fact that he failed to give praise upon the downfall of the wicked Sancherev, King of Assyria. Chizkiyahu failed to give this profound experience religious expression.

We dare not make the same mistake.

Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim possess profound religious significance and meaning. These are days of great Divine Providence - miracles and wonders - and deserve religious expression. By celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim, we express our thanks for the tremendous gifts of the State of Israel and Jerusalem. ■

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