



הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY

PARSHAT TAZRIA-METZORAH 5783 • 2023










ISRAEL
Parsha Picture
Photo by Howie Mischel

וְרַחַץ אֶת בְּשָׂרוֹ
בַּמַּיִם וְטָהַר
וַיִּקְרָא יְד, ב









Mikva in Khirbet Ashun, near Modiin

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
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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrahi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrahi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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Ben Gurion and Geulah

Redemption Through Non-Observant Jews



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrahi

The month of Iyar, which we usher in this Shabbat, has been blessed as a modern month of redemption.

Both the founding of the State of Israel on the 5th of Iyar and the reunification of Jerusalem 19 years later on the 28th of Iyar – both significant miracles of biblical proportions – occurred during this month. This week, of course, we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the State of Israel. The manner in which these miracles transpired has raised for many an important religious question: How is it that since the founding of the modern Zionist movement in 1897, the great achievements of its protagonists have been accomplished primarily by a majority of non-observant secular Jews?

How does this fit with the spiritual visions of a biblical redemption and the in-gathering of the Exiles? Is it possible that such an essential part of the redemption process can happen through people who are distant from the Torah living?

Herzl and Ben Gurion

It is well known that Herzl himself was quite an assimilated Jew before he turned his prodigious talents to the Zionist endeavor in the later part of his life. His son Hans was baptized, and the Chief

Rabbi of Vienna when visiting Herzl's home on Chanukah that Herzl had both a Christmas tree and a Chanukiah. Nevertheless, Herzl devoted the last eight years of his life to the cause of his people with unparalleled passion and laid the foundation for the establishment of the state.

The most significant political leader in the early years of the State was, of course, the first and highly influential Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion. Ben Gurion had a deep connection to Tanach, and a deep sense of Jewish history, while at the same time being a non-observant socialist Jew who even had an affinity with Buddhism. Not to mention the majority of Zionists, many of whom came from various secular backgrounds and some of whom were even hostile to Torah Judaism.

Is this the picture of spiritual salvation we might have imagined?

Lepers, Ministers and Miracles

Indeed, the Sages pointed out that the ways of G-d are mysterious and that Divine miracles can occur in any form or manner – often in the most unexpected ways (*Masechet Me'ila 17b*). One of the remarkable places where we see this is in the unusual haftarah that we read in this week's parsha, Tazria-Metzora. It is the haftarah for Parshat Metzora and is

read when there is a double parsha, as there is this week. It is a most unusual in that it deals with four lepers who bring news of redemption to the Jewish people, and ends with the death of a high-ranking minister in the cabinet of one of Israel's most wicked kings, Yehoram the son of Achav. In fact, the haftarah ends with this highest-ranking minister of the cabinet, השליש in Hebrew, being trampled to death by horses. Why does the haftarah end so negatively with the minister's cruel death, and what is the story of the four lepers all about?

King Yehoram was the son of one of Israel's most wicked kings, Achav. The verse indicates that his son Yehoram, though not as godless as his father, nevertheless continued his father's idolatrous ways. The haftarah is the seventh chapter of Kings II and describes a terrible siege that the king of Aram had laid on Yerushalayim. It seemed that Shomron would fall and the idolatrous city would be taken by Aram.

The great prophet Elisha, the disciple of Eliyahu, informed King Yehoram that G-d would perform a miracle and there would be plenty of food, drink and sustenance for all. The reality on the ground was just the opposite, and it seemed that there was no way that this could happen. Incredibly, that evening the entire mighty army of Aram fled, mistaking some sounds of thunder for one of the other enemy armies about to attack them. The entire camp fled that very night, leaving all the food, drinks, clothes and tents outside the city.



Ultimately, only Hashem possesses all the Divine calculations and acts in ways that are often puzzling to us finite beings.

Four lepers who had been exiled from the city¹ and were also starving, decided to try their luck and go to the army of Aram to ask for food – the worst that could happen to them was that they would die, which seemed to be their fate anyway. They were stunned to find that not a single soldier was left and all the army's food was available. Instead of simply rejoicing, they felt that this was a great day of besorah, good news for Am Yisrael, and they went to tell the people of the city that G-d had performed a great miracle.

When the chief minister heard Elisha's prophecy that salvation would come for the starving city against all odds, he expressed his total disbelief and lack of faith that such a miracle was possible. Did the minister not believe that Hashem had the power to do this? Indeed, the Midrash says that this was not his concern. Of course G-d had the power to do it. His concern was that he believed that Am Yisrael, being the idolatrous and wicked people that they were, would not merit the miracle (Torah Sheleima, Noach 54). When the lepers announced that a miracle had occurred, the people rushed to

the camp of Aram and the minister was trampled to death.

From this story we see how Hashem's salvation can happen in the most unexpected ways. Who would have believed that four outcast lepers would be the *mevasrei hageulah*, the bearers of the news of salvation, namely that the camp of Aram had fled?

Who would have believed that such an idolatrous kingdom, so far removed from the ways of Hashem, could merit such a remarkable miracle that does not seem to fit our traditional religious understanding?

Ultimately, only Hashem possesses all the Divine calculations and acts in ways that are often puzzling to us finite beings. The principle is clear that Divine miracles, deliverance and salvation – indeed, the process of redemption – often occurs in the most unexpected ways and for and through the most unlikely protagonists.

As we usher in the month of Iyar and celebrate Israel's 75th anniversary, we have the opportunity to thank G-d for the remarkable miracles He has done for Am Yisrael in reaching this milestone, and we pray that unity will prevail in bringing all parts of our people together and appreciating the enormity of the times in which we live.

1. This story of the lepers is read on Parshat Metzora since it deals with the laws of the purification of lepers.

PIRKEI AVOT

Aware of Awareness



Rabbi Reuven Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi
Dean of Overseas Students, Yeshivat Hakotel

Scan here to join
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רבי אומר... והסתכל בשלשה דברים ואי אתה בא לידי עברה
דע מה למעלה ממך, עין רואה ואין שומעת, וכל מעשיך בספר נכתבין: (אבות ב:א)

Consciousness

Over the past months, we have studied Pirkei Avot's delineation of the proper view of life. Internalizing and maintaining our consciousness of this view in a way that forges our life's compass can often be challenging. Rav Ovadia MiBartenura points out that most sins emanate not (just) from desire, but (also) from a (temporary) loss of perspective.¹ Having the right values and goals is not enough; we need to be conscious of and driven by them.²

Pirkei Avot speaks about how to accomplish this as well. Two of Avot's *perakim* begin with advice on how to generate the consciousness that helps one avoid sin. The third *perek* opens by quoting the guidance given on this topic by Akavya ben Mahalalel (a tanna who lived in the first *tannaitic* generation) while the second quotes similar guidance offered by Rebbi (Rebbi Yehudah HaNasi — a *tanna* who lived at the end of the Tannaitic period).³ Both *tannaim* advise us to focus on three things⁴, but differ on the type of three they recommend. This week we will study Rebbi's three.

What's Up

Rebbi encourages reflection upon Hashem's presence and omniscience. "Look at three things and you will not come to sin: know what is above you — a seeing eye, and a listening ear, a recording of all of your actions."⁵

The type of consciousness Rebbi recommends has earlier sources in Torah and Nach. The Torah⁶ commands us to wear *tzitzit* so that seeing them will help us avoid sin by reminding us of Hashem and His *mitzvot*.⁷ Dovid HaMelech went beyond remembering Hashem and constantly imagined himself in His actual presence.⁸

Rebbi takes the idea a step further by encouraging us to focus upon the *omniscient* aspects of Hashem's presence. Consciousness of Hashem's awareness of our actions

not only deters sin, but also inspires us to keep *far* away from it.

Rebbi specifies three aspects of Hashem's omniscience.

The Seeing Eye

He begins with "the seeing eye" — the fact that Hashem sees everything in our world.

Our focus on this fact should help us avoid sin.

Many studies have indicated that people are more hesitant to do the wrong thing when they know that others are watching — or even if they see the picture of an eye in front of them.

For example, one study focused on students who were asked to participate in the so-called Dictator Game, in which one is given money together with the opportunity of sharing any or none of it with an anonymous stranger. Beforehand, and without realizing it was part of the experiment, some of the students were briefly shown a pair of eyes as a computer screen saver, while others saw a different image. Those exposed to the eyes gave 55 per cent more to the stranger than the others.

In another study researchers placed a coffee maker in a university hallway. Passers-by could take coffee and leave money in the box. On some weeks a poster with watchful eyes was hanging on the wall nearby, on others a picture of flowers. On the weeks where the eyes were displayed, people left on average 2.76 (!) times as much money as at other times. Ara Norenzayan, author of the book *Big Gods*, from which these studies are taken, concludes that "watched people are nice people."

Obviously, our awareness of the constant presence of Hashem's "eyes" should have an even stronger impact. That is part of what makes religion a force for honest and altruistic behavior and *mitzvah* observance: the belief that G-d sees what we do. It is no coincidence that, as belief in a personal G-d

has waned in the West, surveillance by CCTV and other means has had to be increased.

The Hearing Ear

The "hearing ear" expands Hashem's omniscience. In addition to seeing our actions, Hashem also hears our words. Many of the commentaries see Hashem's "eye" and "ear" as capable of knowing our thoughts as well. As Hashem said to Shmuel- "Man sees only (up to) the eyes (of the other) while Hashem sees straight through to the heart."

Running Record

Rebbi adds a third component — (all of) our actions are also recorded for posterity. What we do is remembered and has long term significance.

We are not always careful about our actions because we see them as lacking significance. The Medrash tells us that, had Reuven known that his saving Yosef would be recorded in the Torah, he would have picked him up on his shoulders and taken him back to Yaakov. Similarly, if Boaz had known that Nach would record the way he cared for Rut, he would have offered her a four-course meal. We should recognize that all of our actions — even those that seem insignificant to us — are, in actuality, recorded and of great significance.

Rebbi's Mishneh In the Tech Age

The Chofetz Chaim used this *mishnah* to explain the technological developments of the beginning of the 20th century. He commented on the invention of the phonograph that: "Earlier generations more readily believed that God sees, hears and records our actions. Unfortunately, in our generation, people have less faith. Therefore, the phonograph had to be created so people could believe that Hashem is recording our actions and our voices.

One wonders how the Chofetz Chaim would view the explosion of recording technology in the hundred years since then? Maybe we need the reality of knowing that our every

Continued on page 7

HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Shemini to Acharei Mot: Yom HaZikaron to Yom HaAtzmaut



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

This year, the fifth of Iyar coincides with the *parshiyot* of Tazria and Metzora, in which we learn of the laws of *tzara'at*, a spiritual and physical malady that renders the afflicted *tamei*: limited from access to the *Mikdash* and removed from the social camp. These *parshiyot* are preceded by Shemini, the narrative of the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu at the *Mishkan's* inauguration.

The Torah charges the *metzora* to rend his garments, leave his hair to grow, cover his mouth and publicly declare his state of ritual impurity. Then, as an independent imperative, the Torah commands the *metzora* to live in isolation. The first two commandments remind us of the laws of mourning following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, as Moshe had instructed Aharon and his remaining sons not to let their hair grow and not to rend their clothes in response to their loss, while the rest of the nation will “bewail the burning.”

In contrast, the *metzora* is not mourning for a relative, but for himself, as if he has died. As such, Chazal formulated that “a *metzora* is considered dead” (Rashi, Bamidbar 12:12, based on Sifrei). That is why the last requirement is mentioned separately; it constitutes the very essence of his “death.” The *metzora* must detach himself from communal life, in which the *Shechina* resides, separating himself from public partnership in the community, from the life of the nation.

The process through which he returns to “life,” as he makes his way back into society, consists of three stages: 1. He returns to the camp by bringing two birds. 2. After seven days of residence in the camp, he returns to his tent. 3. On the eighth day, with special sacrifices, he returns to the *Mishkan*. The ceremony of slaughtering a bird over fresh water, dipping a live bird in its blood and then sending it away, marks the transition from life to death, the rebirth of the *metzora*. The *metzora*, whose disease surfaced on his body with white, dead-colored skin, is “brought back to life” with crimson-colored water and bird’s blood, symbolizing the return to live, healthy flesh.

We may now understand the juxtaposition of the respective *parshiyot* read at this time of year. After the deaths of Nadav and Avihu on *Yom HaShemini* (the eighth day following the inaugural preparations, when the *Shechina* was manifest), we encounter laws of defilement related to childbirth and then the pseudo-death of the *metzora*. But on the same Shabbat, we also read of the process of purification and restoration to individual and communal life. The following Shabbat, we read parashat Acharei Mot, commanding Aharon to purify the *Mishkan* on Yom Kippur, as he dons *bigdei haBad*, special white linen garments, and brings *ketoret*, annually revisiting this sons’ deaths.

As he wears the white garments, the *Kohen Gadol* detaches himself from his gold and

crimson priestly vestments and wears the garments worn by a *Kohen Hedyot*, a regular *kohen*. Every Yom Kippur, the *Kohen Gadol* revisits *Yom HaShemini*, the initial consecration of the *Mishkan*. The core relationship between these two events is to annually restore the *Mishkan* to its earliest beginnings prior to impurities, when the *Shechina* was first manifest.

Simultaneously however, we are reminded of the deaths that accompanied the eighth day. Aharon wears the same uniform as his sons did and reenacts their bringing of the *ketoret*. Every year he dons white garments, symbolizing the color of death, as he revisits the deaths of his sons, and all the sons of Israel that have left the “camp of life,” like the *metzora*. Yet every Yom Kippur – as he sprinkles the blood of the bull and the goat, like the sprinkling of the blood of the bird of the *metzora* – he reminds us that *kappara* may be achieved and the *tumah* of death shall be removed.

Every Yom HaZikaron, dressed in blue – together with our white – we remember the tragic deaths of our soldiers and terror victims, young sons and daughters, who remind us of our own mortality. And the day after, as we read the *parshiyot* of transition from death to life, from *Shoa* to *Tekuma*, from white to gold, crimson, and *techelet*, we raise our flags and celebrate the “inauguration” of the State of Israel, a modern manifestation of the *Shechina's* return to our midst.

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

Question: I accidentally put up my mezuzah with the slant in the wrong direction. Is that okay, or should I put it up again properly with a bracha? Additionally, if one moves into a home previously owned by Sephardim, should the new owners change the angle of the mezuzah?

Answer: The Gemara in Menachot (33a) says: “Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: If one fashioned a *mezuzah* like a *nagar*, it is unfit.”

What exactly does this mean?

Rashi and the Rambam understood that Rav is teaching that one may not affix the *mezuzah* horizontally. According to them, “*nagar*” is a sideways bolt. Therefore, the proper way to place the *mezuzah* is upright.

Tosfot quotes Rabbeinu Tam who poses the exact opposite opinion. According to him, “*nagar*” is a vertical bolt, and placing a *mezuzah* upright would be disrespectful. The *mezuzah*'s orientation should be similar to the *luchot* in the *Aron Kodesh* which were lying horizontally. Similarly, Rabbeinu Tam argues that a *sefer Torah* should sit horizontally in the *Aron Kodesh*, as well as the *parshiot* of *tefillin*.

The Shulchan Aruch (YD 289:6) *paskins* like Rashi and the Rambam, and this is the accepted practice among most Sephardim:

“The *mezuzah* should be erect lengthwise on the length of the doorpost of the doorway, and one should intend that the [word] *shema* that is at the end of the scroll should be [facing] the outside”

However, the Rema writes based on the Maharil that the *mezuzah* should be

slanted, thereby fulfilling both opinions of Rashi/Rambam and Rabbeinu Tam. This is the accepted practice of Ashkenazim and Sephardim of Moroccan origin.

“And those who are scrupulous fulfill both [opinions] and place the *mezuzah* at an incline, at a diagonal. And this is how it is proper to practice, and this is how we practice in these places...”

The Rema adds that the *shema*, at the top of the *mezuzah*, should be slanting towards the door, with the bottom facing out.

“...and one should intend that the top of the *mezuzah*, where the [word] *shema* is, should be towards the inside and the last line should be facing outside.” However, the Maharash, quoted in *Darkei Moshe*, did the exact opposite, with the *shema* facing outwards. Therefore, while the proper practice is to place the *mezuzah* slanted as the Rema writes, if one affixed it in the opposite direction it is fine as well. The essential matter for Ashkenazim is that the *mezuzah* is on a slant, fulfilling both opinions of Rashi/Rambam and Rabbeinu Tam.

There are some Ashkenazim who have the practice of placing the *mezuzah* straight in accordance with the opinion of the Gra.

How slanted should the *mezuzah* be?

The basic understanding of the Rema is that the *mezuzah* should be significantly slanted, and many do this. The Chazon Ish, however, thought the slant should be minimal, because fundamentally we *paskin* like Rashi over Rabbeinu Tam.

If the *mezuzah* was set by the previous Sephardic owners, it is absolutely kosher.

Whether or not it should be changed depends on whether these are tenants or owners. If one rents an apartment from Sephardic owners, he does not need to change the *mezuzah*. However, if an Ashkenazi buys a home from a Sephardi, it is best for him to change the *mezuzot* to be in accordance with Ashkenazic practice (see my *sefer* on *tefillin* for more details regarding the Klaf).

I will add one final point in *machshava*. Imagine that Rashi, Rambam, and Rabbeinu Tam came to a home with a *mezuzah* affixed as we have described. Rashi and the Rambam would say: this is not the proper direction, it is meant to be standing! Slanted is fine *bedieved*. Similarly, Rabbeinu Tam would say: the *mezuzah* is not in the proper direction, it should be horizontal! Neither opinion would be satisfied.

This is a compromise – neither side leaves with everything they want. Nevertheless, at the entrance of every Ashkenazic home, this is exactly what is being represented, and perhaps there is a message here. In a home, there will always be different perspectives and opinions. But, do you want to keep your family together? If so, this can only be accomplished with some compromise. Each side gives up a little bit, even reluctantly, but for the sake of being able to live together. As long as both sides can live with the compromise, this is the proper path. Only through the messages of the *mezuzah* can we safeguard the unity of our families.

● Compiled by Yaakov Panitch.

דיון משפחתי: פרשת תזריע-מצורע

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



גסות הרוח (גאוה) – נלמדת מנעמן שר צבא ארם (מל"ב ה'), שהיה גבור חיל ונשוא פנים והצרעת וריפויה לימדו אותו מהי ענווה; ומעוזיהו המלך (דבה"ב כ"ו, טז-יט), שחזקו מאד את ממלכת יהודה, אך בחזקתו גבה לבו ונכנס אל המקדש להקטיר, ובעקבות זאת הצטרע. מנהיגות היא דבר חיובי, כל עוד אין בה גאוה וגבהות לב. גם כניסה אל המקדש להקטיר יכולה להיות חיובית, מתוך רצון להתקרב אל הקודש, אך כשהיא נעשית מתוך גאוה היא עוברת גבולות, ובכך הופכת לפסולה ולא-ראויה.

חמדת הממון (וצרות עין) – נלמדת מדיני צרעת הבית (ויקרא י"ד, לד-מה), הדורשים מהאדם להוציא החוצה את רכושו, ובכך מתגלה צרות העין שלו (ערכין ט"ז ע"א); ומגיחזי (מל"ב ה'), שבקש מנעמן תשלום על ריפויו, בניגוד לדברי אלישע, ונענש בצרעת. לקיחת תשלום הוגן ודאגה לפרנסה ולשמירת הרכוש הם חשובים והכרחיים לקיום האדם, כל עוד הם נעשים בהגינות, ביושר, מתוך התחשבות בצרכי הזולת, ולא מתוך תאוה מוגזמת.

אם כן, בכל הסיפורים הללו, הופעתה של הצרעת מבהירה שהמעשה אינו ראוי, ונובע מכוונות לא טהורות. בכך הצרעת מהווה תמרוז אזהרה לאדם עצמו ולסביבתו, ומחנכת את האדם לשים לב לנגעי-נפשו, להכיר בהם, ולעמול על טיהור כוונותיו הפנימיות במקביל לטיהור גופו מן הנגע.

החיצוני. חז"ל (בערכין ט"ז ע"א) הצביעו על שבעה נגעי-נפש הגורמים לנגעים, אך הכלי יקר מיקד אותם בשלושה עיקריים: לשון הרע, גאוה וחמדת הממון.

מדוע הנגעים באים דווקא על שלושת נגעי-הנפש הללו?

נראה כי הצרעת מוציאה לאור את הרוע, על מנת שתהיה אפשרות להבחין בו ובעקבות זאת – גם לתקנו. הצרעת נועדה לאותת לאדם שמשוהו לא תקין, בזמן שהוא עדיין אינו מודע לכך. יש מעשים שקל להבחין בטיבם – האם הם נובעים ממקור טוב או ממקור רע. אולם, יש מעשים שיכולים להתפרש לכאן ולכאן, לנבוע ממקור טוב או ממקור רע. כל עוד הרוע מכוסה בעטיפות יפות או "נורמליות", אפילו האדם עצמו אינו מודע לכך, ואין אפשרות לתקנו. באה הצרעת ומדליקה נורת אזהרה שאי אפשר להתעלם ממנה – יש לקולל פנימי שחיבים להתייחס אליו.

התנ"ך נותן כמה דוגמאות לאנשים שהצטרעו, ומהם למדו חכמים באילו מקרים מגיעה הצרעת:

לשון הרע – נלמדת ממרים (ספרא מצורע, ה'), שדיברה על היחסים בין משה לאשה הכושית, ונענשה בצרעת. הדיבור של מרים יכול לנבוע מדאגה כנה למשפחתו של משה, או לכלל נביאי ישראל, אך הצרעת מגלה שדבריה נבעו גם משורש בעייתי – חוסר האמון בדרגתו המיוחדת של משה (רמב"ם טומאת צרעת ט"ו) ואולי אפילו קנאה (רשב"ם).

פרשות תזריע-מצורע מופיעה רשימה של נגעים המטמאים את האדם (או את הבגד והבית), והתורה מלמדת כיצד מאבחנים נגעים אלה ומהו תהליך הטהרה מהם. למרות שמדובר בנגעי-גוף, המאבחן של הנגע הוא הכהן (ולא רופא); הנגע מטמא (ולא ממת או מחליש); והתיקון הוא ע"י תהליך טהרה עם כללים הלכתיים מדויקים (ולא תהליך רפואי). מתוך כך אנו מבינים שנגעים אלה אינם מחלה רגילה, אלא יש בהם משהו מעבר לכך.

האדם נברא עפר מן האדמה וה' נפח בו נשמת חיים, והתורה מבהירה שהשילוב הייחודי הזה גורר בעקבותיו קשר בין המצב הפיזי והגופני של האדם למצבו הנפשי והרוחני (למשל: ירידת הגשם בארץ ישראל תלויה בקיום המצוות). דיני נגעים הם אחד המקומות בהם מודגש עניין זה, כפי שמפרש כלי יקר:

נראה לי לפרש לשון מצורע שהיא מלה מורכבת מוציא רע שמגלה ומוציא לחוץ כל רעתו שבקרבו, הן העיפוש הפנימי, הן אם הוא מכה רעהו בסתר בשוט לשונו ואין הבריות יודעין להשמר ממנו על כן הקדוש ברוך הוא מפרסם על החנפים ומוציא כל רעתו לחוץ כדי שתגלה רעתו בקהל... והם לשון הרע, וגסות רוח, וחמדת הממון... (כלי יקר לויקרא י"ג, ב).

מדברי הכלי יקר ניתן להבין שהנגעים מבטאים כלפי חוץ איזושהו נגע פנימי, בנפש, ובעקבות הופעת הנגע מוטל על האדם לברר מהו הנגע הרוחני הגורם לנגע

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move is observed, heard, and recorded by cameras, eyes, and satellites to help us believe that Hashem is doing the same.

May the knowledge of the FBI's records help us recognize Hashem's similar capacity and may our focus on this capability keep us far from sin and inspire us to live our lives properly.

We have seen how Rabbi uses awareness of Hashem's awareness to inspire us to keep our distance from sin. Next week we will see how Akavya ben Mehalai aims for the same goal through consciousness of the reality of our own existence.

● Summarized by Rafi Davis

1. Chazal (Talmud Bavli, Mesechet Sotah 3a) attribute sin to a 'ruach shtut' (silly spirit) that enters man. See also Kli Yakar (Bereishit 32:25) who uses this idea to explain why the angel who fought with Yaakov was named Samuel. The root of the name is 'samah' which means to blind because the yetzer hara causes us to sin by blinding us to sin's true significance.
2. We learn the importance of this idea from the contrast Parshat Va'era (9:20-21) makes between those who feared Hashem and those who did not "pay attention" to His words. Yir'at Shamayim requires more than just belief. It requires consciousness and reflection. See Mesilat Yesharim (Perek 2) who compares someone who lives life without reflection to the danger faced by a blind man walking on the river bank.
3. The first perek of Avot tracks the ba'alei hamesorah all the way down to the generation of Hillel and Shammai. From Hillel and Shammai, the Mishnah moves to Rabban Gammiel, who was not technically the ba'al mesorah, but, rather, the son of Hillel. From

there, we track by lineage, continuing with Rabban Shimon ben Gammiel and continuing down to the heritage of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (known as Rebbi), who lived in the last generation of the Tanna'im. He is chosen to open the second perek of Avot in order to highlight his central role in editing the Mishneh.

4. The fact that tanna'im from both ends of the Tannaitic period encourage reflecting upon three things shows the relevance of this model to different historical periods.
5. Avot 2:1.
6. Sefer Bamidbar 15:39
7. See Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Mezuzah 6:13) who uses tzitzit as a model for the mitzvot of tefillin and mezuzah. All three mitzvot are meant to help us avoid sin by reminding us of Hashem's presence in our lives.
8. Tehillim 16:8. See Rema who opens his comments on the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 1:1) by describing this pasuk as the great principle of the Torah and personal growth.

What does tzara'at have to do with us?



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

At first glance, there does not appear to be any connection between this week's Torah portions (Tazria-Metzora) and Independence Day. These Torah portions deal extensively with tzara'at. A person guilty of lashon hara (insulting, derogatory, or divisive speech) was punished with tzara'at, a condition of skin discoloration and hair loss that could ultimately infect clothes and houses, too. The sinful individual had to undergo a period of isolation until the necessary lesson had been learned, tzara'at disappeared, and a return to human society was granted.

Yet if we look at history, we will discover that the culture of speech is intimately associated with our independent existence on this land. Lashon hara, gossip, curses, baseless hatred – all of these resulted in exile from the Land of Israel. It began as early as the Garden of Eden. Our commentators explain that the serpent spoke lashon hara about G-d. Adam and Eve believed the serpent and therefore sinned and were punished with expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Later, Yosef spoke lashon hara about his brothers. He would bring slanderous stories about them to Ya'akov. The result? Descent into Egyptian exile for many long years. After we finally left Egypt, the spies spoke lashon hara about the Land of Israel. Instead of choosing positive and optimistic words regarding the Promised Land they nearly succeeded in persuading the people to cease their journey towards it. The result? 40 years of wandering in the desert.

There are many such stories and all of them happened before the era of social media networks and the abysmal

language that they produce. From the standpoint of lashon hara, the content of political discussions and media presentations is sinful. It doesn't matter what your opinion happens to be about a certain individual (in favor of Netanyahu or against him, for example); the very act of expressing a divisive opinion is likely to endanger our existence here together. So perhaps the Torah portion that we will read on Shabbat should serve as a warning sign: if we want to celebrate many more Independence Days, we must remember that a society without a culture of refined speech – where people curse, slander, gossip, and shame others – will not survive. It's up to us.



Lashon Hara (derogatory or negative speech) is the main subject of the Torah portion we just read on Shabbat. It's a Parasha that describes the punishment of Tzara'at, a skin condition characterized by blemishes that result from negative speech. But what about lashon hatov – good, positive, or complimentary speech?

Many commentators caution that just as we need to refrain from negative speech, we need to be mindful of instances where we could say something positive, but refrain from doing so. The idea is not to remain silent, but rather to say something positive and admiring: Why not compliment someone who deserves it? Why not say something praiseworthy about someone who did something good? And, in general, why not share beautiful thoughts and uplifting ideas? Why not use this powerful tool of speech in order to praise, to gladden hearts, and to simply

give others a good, revitalizing feeling that elevates their mood?

In the Holy Zohar it is written: "Just as a person is punished for evil speech, he is punished for good speech that he could have spoken but did not."

This is a reminder to look around and search for opportunities to speak in a positive and complimentary manner.



"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 G-d Himself and tells Eve untruths about Him. ("And the serpent said to the woman, 'You will surely not die for G-d 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

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For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis

Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi

Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised” (Vayikra 12:3).

At the beginning of this week's first Parsha, Tazria, we come across the commandment of circumcision. The Midrash relates an interesting dispute between Rabbi Akiva and the Roman Governor Turnus Rufus, who questioned the act of circumcision:

“Turnus Rufus said to him (Rabbi Akiva), ‘Since He (Hashem) wants circumcision, why doesn't he (the child) leave his mother's womb circumcised?’ Rabbi Akiva said to him, ‘And why does his umbilical cord come out with him? Should his mother not cut his umbilical cord? And why is he not born circumcised? It is because The Holy One Blessed Be He only gave Israel the commandments in order to refine them (Israel) with them (the commandments)’” (Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria 7).



By working to improve ourselves and refine ourselves through the commandments, may we succeed in elevating ourselves and the world around us.

At first glance, Turnus Rufus asked a fair question. Seeing as Hashem is the Creator and Master of all, how dare we alter what He created? If He really sees the body as incomplete until circumcision, why does He not create us in a circumcised, complete state? Rabbi Akiva challenged Turnus Rufus' basic assumption that all natural, divinely created states must inherently be complete. The commandment of circumcision, like all commandments, exists for us to refine ourselves, for nobody is born perfect.

Similarly, in explanation of this commandment, the Sefer HaChinuch writes:

“And He (Hashem) wanted the completion to be by man, and He did not create him complete from the womb, in order to hint to him that just as it is up to him to complete the state of his body, so it is up to him to complete the state of his soul in correcting his actions” (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzva 2).

According to the Sefer HaChinuch, circumcision provides us with a physical reminder that just as we are meant to perfect ourselves physically, we are meant to work to perfect ourselves spiritually.

By working to improve ourselves and refine ourselves through the commandments, may we succeed in elevating ourselves and the world around us.

Shabbat Shalom!

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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, G-d 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.

The Plague of Evil Speech



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

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

Evil speech, *lashon hara*, was considered by the Sages to be one of the worst sins of all. Here is how Maimonides summarises it:

The Sages said: there are three transgressions for which a person is punished in this world and has no share in the world come – idolatry, illicit sex, and bloodshed – and evil speech is as bad as all three combined. They also said: whoever speaks with an evil tongue is as if he denied G-d . . . Evil speech kills three people – the one who says it, the one who accepts it, and the one about whom it is said. (*Hilchot Deot* 7:3)

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

There were ferocious exchanges. Each side issued condemnations and excommunications against the other. There

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

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

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

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

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

Similar stories could be told about several other outstanding scholars – among them, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes, Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer, Rabbi Yitzhak Reines, and even the late Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik

of blessed memory, who was brought to court in Boston in 1941 to face trumped-up charges by the local Jewish community. Even these shameful episodes were only a continuation of the vicious war waged against the Hassidic movement by their opponents, the *mitnagdim*, which saw many Hassidic leaders (among them the first Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Ladi) imprisoned on false testimony given to the local authorities by other Jews.

For a people of history, we can be bewilderingly obtuse to the lessons of history. Time and again, unable to resolve their own conflicts civilly and graciously, Jews slandered their opponents to the civil authorities, with results that were disastrous to the Jewish community as a whole. Despite the fact that the whole of rabbinic Judaism is a culture of argument; despite the fact that the Talmud explicitly says that the school of Hillel had its views accepted because they were 'gentle, modest, taught the views of their opponents as well as their own, and taught their opponents' views before their own' (Eruvin 13b) – despite this, Jews have



And what, after all, is evil speech? Mere words. Yet words have consequences.

continued to excoriate, denounce, even excommunicate those whose views they do not understand, even when the objects of their scorn (Maimonides, Malbim, and the rest) have been among the greatest-ever defenders of Orthodoxy against the intellectual challenges of their age.

Of what were the accusers guilty? Only evil speech. And what, after all, is evil speech? Mere words. Yet words have consequences. Diminishing their opponents, the self-proclaimed defenders of the faith diminished themselves and their faith. They managed to convey the impression that Judaism is simple-minded, narrow, incapable of handling complexity, helpless in the face of challenge, a religion of anathemas instead of arguments, excommunication instead of reasoned debate.

Maimonides and Malbim took their fate philosophically. Yet one weeps to see a great tradition brought so low.

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

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- Do you think the sin of *lashon hara* justifies public shaming? Why?
- Where do you see the most *lashon hara* in the world today? What can be done to address this?
- Do you think social media brings more good than bad to the world?



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Miktzas HaYom K'Kulo



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

If she ceases her flow, she must count seven days for herself, and afterwards she may be purified. (Vayikra 15:28)

The Shelah HaKadosh writes that the phrase *וּסְפָרָה לָהּ* implies that there is a *mitzvah* for a *zavah gedolah* to count the days of *shivah nekiyim* (seven clean days) verbally, just as one counts *sefiras ha'omer*.

On account of this novel idea, the Noda B'Yehudah applied to the Shelah the phrase, *אֹהֶב מְצוּוֹת לֹא יִשְׁבַע מְצוּוֹת* – a lover of *mitzvos* will never be satisfied with *mitzvos*, an adaptation of the *passuk*, – *אֹהֶב כֶּסֶף לֹא יִשְׁבַע כֶּסֶף* “A lover of money will never be satisfied with money” (Koheles 5:9). The Noda B'Yehudah argues that, in fact, there is no *mitzvah* for the *zavah* to count verbally, but rather to be meticulous about the cleanliness of the days of the *shiv'ah nekiyim*. The pious Shelah HaKadosh, out of his love for *mitzvos*, was eager to create additional *mitzvos*, and thus included the verbal counting of the *shivah nekiyim*.

Some might argue, however, that Tosfos concurs with the Shelah's approach. Tosfos questions why a *zavah* does not recite a *berachah* when she counts her *shivah nekiyim* in the same way that we recite a *berachah* before counting each day of the *omer*. Tosfos answers that a *zavah* may not count with a *berachah* since she cannot control the fulfillment of the *mitzvah*, as one can in the case of *sefiras ha'omer*. She may experience a flow that will nullify her *shivah nekiyim*, and the *berachah* she had recited on the previous days will then retroactively be a *berachah l'vatalah*.

Although the simple reading of the question might imply that Tosfos subscribes to the Shelah's position that a *zavah* should count each day of her *shivah nekiyim* verbally, Rav Soloveitchik dismissed this

notion. He explained that according to Tosfos, the way the woman fulfills *וּסְפָרָה לָהּ* is by performing *bedikos* on each of the *shivah nekiyim* to ascertain that she has no further flow of *dam zivah*. Thus, Tosfos means that perhaps the *zavah* should recite a *berachah* before she performs a *bedikah* on each of the *shivah nekiyim*.

The Gemara in Niddah (67b) understands the concluding phrase of the *passuk*, *וְאַחַר תְּטַהַר*, to mean that – *אֶחָר מַעֲשֵׂה תְטַהַר* “after the act [of *sefirah-bedikah*] she may purify herself.” Thus, the *passuk* teaches that after sunrise of the seventh day, once she counts even a part of the seventh day, she may be *toveles* immediately. This is permitted due to the principle of *מִקְצַת הַיּוֹם כְּכוֹלּוֹ* – part of the day is equivalent to the whole day.

It is noteworthy that a *niddah* differs from a *zavah* in this respect. A *niddah* must wait until the entire seventh day has passed and may be *toveles* only after nightfall, at the beginning of the eighth day (Pesachim 90b). In other words, we do not say *מִקְצַת הַיּוֹם כְּכוֹלּוֹ* with regard to a *niddah*, as we do for a *zavah*.

We may suggest that the reason for this difference is that, unlike a *zavah*, a *niddah* is not commanded *mid'oraisa* to count *shivah nekiyim*. A *niddah* simply is *toveles* seven full days after the onset of her flow, provided that her flow has ceased. Therefore, we cannot declare *אֶחָר מַעֲשֵׂה תְטַהַר*, as there is no specific action that a *niddah* performs during her seven days of *tum'ah*. In contrast, *אֶחָר מַעֲשֵׂה תְטַהַר* teaches that after a *zavah* performs a *bedikah* on the morning of the seventh day of her *shivah nekiyim*, she may be *toveles* immediately.

Rav Soloveitchik explained that the condition of *אֶחָר מַעֲשֵׂה תְטַהַר* forms the basis

of the *halachah* that a *zavah* may not be *toveles* on the night prior to the seventh day of her *shivah nekiyim*.

The only *ma'aseh* a *zavah* performs during the *shivah nekiyim* is daily *bedikos*, and she must perform those *bedikos* during the daytime. In order to say *מִקְצַת הַיּוֹם כְּכוֹלּוֹ*, one must perform a *ma'aseh* on the final day of a given time period, and then we assume that the *nihug* of part of the final day is sufficient. Since there is no *ma'aseh* for a *zavah* to perform at night, *מִקְצַת הַיּוֹם כְּכוֹלּוֹ* cannot be applied to permit a *zavah* to be *toveles* on the night of the seventh day.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha II.

A Specific Mission



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
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As we are aware, Parshat Tazria contains within it all of the different ways to recognize a מצורע, and what is considered מצורע and what is not. Beyond that, in Parshat Naso, we find an additional rule about a מצורע, that one of the consequences of being a מצורע is that he must be sent outside of the Jewish camp, along with other impure people.

”צו, אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְיִשְׁלְחוּ מִן-הַמִּחֲנֶה, כָּל-צָרוּעַ וְכָל-זָב; וְכָל, טִמְאָ לְנֶפֶשׁ.”

The Satmar Rebbe, in his commentary of דברי יואל on Parshat Naso, comments that the Pasuk is written in a different way than most other commands that we find in the Torah. The Pasuk in Parshat Naso about sending the מצורע outside of the camp is seemingly talking to the entire nation, commanding them to send out anyone with צרעה. Yet, the obligation is ultimately on the impure person himself, that he is commanded to leave the camp, and therefore normally the Torah would just speak to the מצורע himself, commanding him to leave the camp. Why, then, did the Torah choose to express this rule as if placing an obligation on the entire Jewish nation? Furthermore, right after the Jewish people were commanded about sending out the people with צרעה, the Pesukim talk about the fact that the Jews immediately listened. Not often do we find in the Torah cases when Moshe tells over a Mitzvah to the Jewish people and that the Torah records that they immediately kept that Mitzvah. For example, we don't find that the Jewish people were commanded about the Mitzvah of Lulav and Esrog, and that they immediately followed that Mitzvah.

The Satmar Rebbe answers both of these questions through a proper analysis on the wording used to describe the sending out of the מצורע. In a different context, the מדרש איכה comments on the difference between two words in the Hebrew language that seem very similar but really have very different connotations, לגרש vs. לשלח. Both mean to send someone away, however with very different connotations. The Midrash explains that לגרש is to send someone away simply because he should not be there, without regard to where he is going. On the other hand, the word לשלח is to send someone with a purpose to arrive at a certain point, giving significance to where you are sending him to and why he is going. The Midrash uses this to explain how Hashem views our exile, noting that we were not sent out of Eretz Yisrael as “לגרש”, but rather as “לשלח”. We were not exiled simply, we do not deserve Eretz Yisrael any more, but rather we were sent into exile with some specific purpose, some aspect of the world to fix. This is the distinction made by the מדרש איכה between these two words.

In a side note, although appropriate as we begin to prepare for Pesach, this distinction between שליחות and גירושין can also be used to explain a difficult Pasuk regarding the Jews leaving Egypt. The Pasuk there says “וְיִגְרֹשׁ מֵאֶרְצוֹ כִּי יִגְדֹּל חֲזָקָה, וְיִשְׁלַחם;” וְיִגְדֹּל חֲזָקָה, וְיִגְרֹשׁם מֵאֶרְצוֹ. Hashem tells Moshe that the Jews will go out of Egypt, although uses a redundant wording of “strong hand” twice, and also alternates between יגרשם and ישלחם. Rashi explains that the first “strong hand” is referring to the hand of Hashem, while the second “strong hand” is referring to the hand of Pharaoh. Based on the idea from the מדרש

איכה, this fits beautifully with the Pasuk. When Hashem sends us out of Egypt, it is with a specific purpose, and therefore uses the wording of ישלחם. However, when Pharaoh sends us out of Egypt, it is obviously with no other intention other than us leaving the country, and therefore uses the word of יגרשם.

Going back to the discussion of מצורע, the Satmar Rebbe uses this idea to explain the Pesukim in Parshat Naso. Obviously, the actual obligation of being sent out of the camp is incumbent specifically on those with צרעה. However, the Pasuk is commanding the rest of the nation to convey to those with צרעה that they are going out as שליחות, and not as גירושין. Immediately, the Jews headed to this command. They sent those people with צרעה out of the camp, although encouraged them that they were not simply being sent away, but rather being sent out of the camp with a specific goal, a specific mission for them to accomplish. This is ultimately the responsibility of the entire nation, that whoever has to leave the camp for whatever impurity it may be, be encouraged that it is merely a שליחות, a purposeful sending, and not, chas v'shalom, a permanent גירושין. This is the meaning of the Pesukim in Parshat Naso, and the proper understanding on how the Jews were instructed to send out the people afflicted with צרעה.

● Edited by Yehuda Kaufold and Josh Harris.

The Meaning of “Yom Ha’atzmaut”



Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

The term Yom Ha’atzmaut is taken from the root ‘Etzem’, which means a ‘bone’.

So what is the connection between a bone and independence?

The first time that the term ‘Etzem’ is mentioned in the Torah is in the biblical account of Genesis – ‘Etzem Mei’Atzamai’, God took a bone from Adam and with it he formed Eve, who became a separate person, in her own right. An independent individual. Hence, the connection between ‘Etzem’ and ‘Atzmaut’, a ‘bone’ and ‘independence’.

For us, the connection actually goes much further than that. The Prophet Ezekiel describes a remarkable vision of a valley of dry bones. Bones which came up from under the ground, flesh came onto those bones, then those bodies were clothed and people started to march towards the Land of Israel. It is a great description of the ingathering of Jewish exiles.

And isn’t that exactly the story of the 1940’s? One of the most horrific images of the Shoah are those photos of hundreds, if not thousands of bones of our precious Jewish people, who were murdered so brutally. And yet, within just a few years, we saw a miraculous ingathering of Jewish exiles from right around the world, which led to the declaration of independence in 1948.

That was a journey from ‘Atzamat’ to ‘Atzmaut’ – from the despair of our sorrowful experiences in the Shoah, through to the exhilaration of our celebrations of independence.

When the Torah refers to the holy day of Yom Kippur, reference there is made to Be’etzem Hayom Hazeh, ‘in the midst of the day’. Literally, it is ‘in the bone of that day’. And from here the Talmud develops the concept of Itzumo Shel Yom, ‘the essence of the day’.

You know, the skeletal form of a human being, made up of bones is the central feature of our physical selves, and that is what is being referred to with regard to Yom Kippur. And isn’t that exactly what the Land of Israel, what Medinat Yisrael, is for us today?

It is central to our existence. It is like that skeletal form of the body – it holds us upright, it gives us pride and we, therefore, as we approach Yom Ha’atzmaut, can celebrate the fact that like Eve, who became an independent person, Israel is now a proud, independent country amongst the nations of the world. We can celebrate the transition from darkness to light and we can also count our blessings, to have Israel as a central feature and an important part of the existence of our nation.

I wish you all a Chag Ha’atzmaut Sameach.

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The Value of Time



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

After a woman gives birth she is obligated to offer a *Korban Chatat*. Many commentators ask why a *yoledet* brings a *chatat*. This type of sacrifice is typically brought after one engages in a transgression. This woman just gave birth, how is this miraculous event related to a sacrifice that is generally offered to redeem some sort of sin?

The Gemara in Kritut 26, suggests that when a woman gives birth, due to the pain she experiences, she swears never to bear a child again. However, as time passes, and she enjoys the child, she regrets having stated or felt that way and is likely to have additional children, irrespective of the pain she will experience again. For breaking that promise, she offers a *korban chatat*.

The contractions and labor pains are real. What causes the woman to change her mind? Does she realize that the pain is worth it? If so, then why would she have to bring a *chatat* after a second child? Isn't she likely to refrain from taking the same oath at that juncture? Perhaps the pain she experiences at her second birth may be more severe and she may again take the same oath. Why does she continue to have children if she experiences such



When one can control their time, they need to be sure to utilize it efficiently and productively.

pain? Does she try to trick herself into believing that it won't be a painful experience at each future birth?

Rav Avigdor Neventzal suggests that the woman knows what she experienced and what she is likely to experience at a future birth. What changes? **The passage of time!** When she experiences the pain of childbirth, she perceives reality differently. She is caught in the moment of discomfort and may not focus on the beautiful child and the family being created. It is only after the passage of some time that the woman appreciates the child and is willing to undergo agony in order to have another child. It is the passage of time that can change one's perspective.

This shabbat is also Rosh Chodesh. Why is it that the first collective mitzva commanded to Bnei Yisrael is "Hachodesh Hazeh Lachem"? There are many other

mitzvot that one would deem more appropriate to reveal to Am Yisrael right before they are to be taken out of Mitzrayim. Perhaps the mitzva of Shabbat, or of Belief in G-d. Why is the first mitzva to bless the new month?

Am Yisrael are at the crossroads now of going from slavery to freedom. A slave is not in control of their time. Their master tells them when to rise, when to work, take lunch and when they can return home. Now that they will become free men and women, they will be in control of their time. What Hashem is demanding of them, is to *sanctify their time*. Freedom should not lead to wasting time. When one can control their time, they need to be sure to utilize it efficiently and productively.

Time is a gift. Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is the future. The time we experience now – is a "present". Through the passage of time, the *yoledet* changes her perspective and desires more children. We should always appreciate the time we have and be as productive as we can with G-d's gift of time. Chodesh Tov!

Parshas Tazria/Yom Ha'zikaron 5783



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

Parshas Tazria, the first of this week's double-parshios focuses mainly on the identification and diagnosis of the spiritual malady of *tzara'as*: a spiritual illness with a physical manifestation. Chazal lists seven causes of *tzara'as*, the most well-known being the sin of *lashon ha'rah*, evil and slanderous speech.

The beginning of the *parsha*, however, deals with a different topic entirely: *tumas ha'yoledes* – ritual impurity of the mother resulting from childbirth.

Why would a new mother, who has just given birth to new life, find herself in a state of ritual impurity?

Elyasaf Peretz quotes an interesting, impactful and poignant idea.

“Only through crisis can we grow. This concept appears in the Torah: in Egypt, the word for the place where the Israelite women sat during childbirth was called *mashber*, which also means ‘crisis.’ The purest thing, bringing new life into the world, emerged from crisis.

“Why is the new mother described as *niddah*, ritually impure? Because the moment she brings new life into the world, she also mourns. As long as she doesn't give birth to the baby, she has another person inside her. The moment the infant emerges and is born, something inside her breaks [with the loss of life], and [even in her joy] she becomes a different person” (Miriam's Song, The Story of Miriam Peretz, Gefen Publishing, p.284).

The moment the child leaves the mother, he is external to her. And as long as he is external to her, his fate becomes his own. She can love him, pray for him, feed him, caress him and give him her all – but in a very real sense, he is now on his own.

His fate is no longer her fate, his future is external to her. And even giving her all, at times, is not enough...

And so, at the moment of birth and a time of great joy, something inside the mother breaks, reflected in her *niddah* status.

Rav Soloveitchik related, “Nicolae Ceausescu (tyrant who ruled Communist Romania for 20 years) visited Anwar Sadat two weeks before the famous Yom Kippur – I can't call Yom Kippur infamous, can't say that – that tragic Yom Kippur. And he discussed the matter of the war. Everybody knew about it. So he warned Sadat not to start the war, for you know the Jewish army is superior. Sadat admitted it, that militarily it is a lost cause. But there is another reason for starting the war, he said.

“Sadat pulled open a drawer and took a clipping from a paper and gave it to Ceausescu. Ceausescu took the clipping of the paper, and the script was completely unknown to him, not a Latin script. What kind of paper. A Hebrew paper. What is the name of the paper? Ma'ariv, in red letters.

“So Sadat said, ‘What do you see here? Take a look at the paper.’ Ceausescu said to Sadat, ‘I can't read it, I don't know the language. It may as well be Chinese.’ He said, ‘Take a look at this picture. What is it? A young boy in uniform.’ ‘What are you showing me?’ Ceausescu asked. ‘You know who this young boy was?’ Sadat replied. ‘He was a soldier. He was killed in the front, along the Suez Canal. The Jewish people mourned for him. His picture is on the front page of the paper. Such a people cannot live long in a war of attrition. If every individual is dear to them, and they grieve and mourn for every individual,

they'll have to lose the war, no matter how wonderful their weapons are.’

“...The fear that young men should not die, the eagerness to protect a life, to save a young boy, overrides every fear and every logical consideration. And this is exactly what I told you. In *Yahadus*, if one dies, the world died! שכל המאבד נפש אחת מישראל, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו אבד עולם מלא, The world collapsed! It is a true story” (The Rav Thinking Aloud on the Parsha, Bamidbar, p.167-168).

לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהָרֵג וּלְאַבֵּד אֶת-כָּל-הַיְהוּדִים מִנְעָר וְעַד-זָקֵן וְטַף וְנָשִׁים – *To destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, from young to old, infants to women...*

Rabbis, scholars, simple men, *charedim*, *dati*, *chiloni*, kippah-wearers and bare-headed, left and right, elderly and young, men and women, children and infants, brides-to-be and mothers-to-be (like Tali Hatuel, 8 months pregnant with her first boy, and her 4 daughters; 2004), *olim chadashim* and Israeli born and bred, families and individuals, young soldiers and reservists, lone soldiers and already bereaved soldiers... שכל המאבד נפש אחת מישראל, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו אבד עולם מלא!

And yet, despite it all, by the very grace of G-d, we are still here. From time immemorial, they have tried... and tried... and tried to destroy us – time and again. And yet, *whoever survives this hell*, my grandfather said as he lay on the wooden slats in the nightmarish barracks after another day of backbreaking labor, *will live to see Moshiach. Whoever survives this hell, will leave to see a Jewish state.*

And so, at the very moment the mother gives birth and the child leaves the comfort and safety of her womb, she becomes ritually impure with the loss of life from within.

Yom Ha'Atzma'ut and Tehillim Perek 107



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

The accepted minhag in Eretz Yisrael is that on Yom Ha'Atzma'ut and Yom Yerushalaim we read Tehillim perek 107 before T'fillat Maariv. A simple analysis of this perek will help us understand why.

The perek can easily be divided into four parts:

- 1) 1-3 – the opening statement
- 2) 4-32 – the main section
- 3) 33-41 – an additional section
- 4) 42-43 – the closing statement.

We should expect that the opening and closing statements should relate to the internal content of the perek. The internal content can be divided into two sections – main and additional. The main section contains four cases of salvation, each presented in a similar pattern, while the additional section contains a different structure.

We shall begin with the main section, as its pattern is quite easy to discern. It contains four cases when a person or group is required to thank Hashem for its salvation. Each case follows the same basic four-stage pattern.

A) Tzarah – A Situation of Distress

In each case a different crisis is presented.

B) Tza'akah – Crying Out to Hashem for Assistance

In each case – the same pasuk (6,13,19,28):

“V'yitzaku el Hashem b'tzar lahem, mim'tzukatam yoshi'aym.”

C) Yeshuah – The Salvation

In each case the specific salvation is presented.

D) Hodayah – Thanks

Each case begins with the same general pasuk (8,15,21,31):

“Yodu l'Hashem chasdo, v'nifl'otav livnei adam”

and is followed by a more specific pasuk of 'hodaya.'

We are all familiar with these four cases of distress presented by the perek, as they are the four cases when a person today is required to “bench gomel”:

- I. One who crossed a desert (4-5)
- II. One who was released from prison (10-12)
- III. One who fell deathly ill and recovered (17-18)
- IV. One who returned from travel at sea (23-27). [During the time of the Temple, these four cases required a person to bring a Korban Todah. Today, we “bench gomel” for them, usually after an aliya.]

The simple lesson that we are to learn from the main section is quite obvious. When a person is in distress (A), he is expected to pray to Hashem for assistance (B). He should also relate to the possibility that his distress is in punishment of his wayward behavior (see psukim 11, 17, and 20). Upon his deliverance (C), he is expected to thank Hashem and tell the story of his salvation in public (D).

The additional section (33-41) relates to Hashem's 'hashgacha' (providence) – G-d's control over nature in response to the deeds of man. G-d can take a fruitful land and cause it to become a desert (33-34). He can also do the exact opposite (35). A society can prosper and then fail, the failure being in punishment of their deeds (36-39). Hashem can uplift the afflicted by this society and return him to prosperity (40-41).

The two internal sections of the perek both deal with the recognition by man of Hashem's 'hashgacha' in his individual and communal life. Man is expected to realize that his distress may possibly be in punishment for his deeds. In any case, he is expected to call out to Hashem for assistance. Man is also expected to find the hand of G-d in his

history, in the rise and fall of societies. This understanding strengthens and directs his relationship with G-d.

The opening pasuk (1-3) relates this concept to the historical aspect of our national existence.

“Hodu L'Hashem ki tov, ki l'olam chasdo. Yom'ru ge'ulei Hashem asher g'alam miyad tzar, umei'artzot kibtzum mimizrach u'maarav, mitzafon, u'miyam.”

Jews in distress who were saved and gathered together from all four corners of the earth are required to praise Hashem (say Hallel) for their deliverance. The perek then continues with several examples of Hashem's hashgacha in the two sections explained above. In the closing pasuk, “Mi chacham v'yishmor ay'leh, v'yit'bon'nu chasdei Hashem,” we find the lesson of this perek. One who is wise will understand this concept of 'hashgacha' and be able to find the “chesed” and hand of Hashem in the history of mankind.

From the opening psukim, it becomes clear why this perek was chosen to read on Yom Ha'Atzma'ut. During the first half of the twentieth century, especially the Holocaust, Am Yisrael was in terrible distress. The State of Israel became the refuge for tens of thousands of Jews who had no where else to turn. Olim from all directions returned to Israel. There were many cases of individual and group salvation, but their return to the land of their ancestors was their common denominator. A desolate and swampy land which thousands of years ago was once fruitful, became fruitful and prosperous once again. One who is wise can perceive through the events of the last century G-d's message to His people. On Yom Ha'Atzma'ut, we must not only thank Hashem for the salvation of the previous generation; we must take this challenge to guide the direction of our own generation.

Self-Destructive Arrogance



Rabbi Eli Mansour

Edmond J Safra Synagogue, Brooklyn

Parashiyot Tazria and Mesora devote a great deal of attention to the laws of Sara'at, a condition that would befall people as a punishment for various sins. Sara'at manifested itself as a discoloration either in a person's skin, in his clothing, or on the walls of his home. In the case of bodily Sara'at, the individual was required to remain alone, in quarantine, outside his city, reflecting and repenting, until his ailment was cured and a special ceremony was performed through which he regained his Tahara (purity).

The Torah requires a person who sees a discoloration on his skin to come before a Kohen, who would inspect the skin and determine whether the individual indeed suffers from Sara'at. In formulating this requirement, the Torah writes, "Ve'huba El Aharon Ha'kohen O El Ahad Mi'banav Ha'kohanim" – "he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons, the Kohanim" (13:2). Significantly, the Torah does not say that the person should himself go to the Kohen; rather, it says that he should "be brought" to the Kohen, implying that others force him to approach the Kohen to have the skin discoloration inspected.

We can understand the Torah's formulation by observing the unfortunate situation of an addict. Very often, addicts refuse to acknowledge that they have a problem that requires professional help. They insist that they are fully in control, that their drinking – for example – is not a very big deal, and that they could stop if they felt they needed to. Human nature is such that we do not like to recognize our faults and failures. And thus the Torah envisions the person's family and peers bringing him to a Kohen to have his skin discoloration evaluated, because, in many



When pride becomes our highest priority, we are willing to sacrifice everything else, and we end up destroying ourselves.

instances, the person will refuse to do so on his own. He will continue along his path of self-destructive behavior rather than humbly admit that he has a problem which needs to be addressed.

Developing this point further, one of the sins mentioned by the Gemara as causes of Sara'at is arrogance. Few character traits are more self-destructive than arrogance. Indeed, the Mishna teaches in Pirkeh Abot (4:21), "Jealousy, desire and [the pursuit of] honor remove a person from this world." Pride and a lust for honor lead a person to act irrationally, against his own best interests. Such a person will almost certainly not recognize his arrogance as a spiritual ill that must be addressed, and so "Ve'huba" – he must be brought to the Kohen, because he would not likely approach the Kohen on his own.

The Book of Melachim II (chapter 5) tells the story of Na'aman, the commander of the army of Aram, an enemy country north of Israel. Na'aman was a very successful and prominent figure, but he suffered terribly from Sara'at. Somebody advised him to travel to Israel and consult with Elisha, the prophet, who would be able to cure his condition. Na'aman arrived with a large entourage, and Elisha, without even bothering to greet the general, sent his assistant to tell Na'aman that he should bathe in the Jordan River, and he would then be cured.

Na'aman was incensed. He had assumed that the prophet would greet him with great honor, and perform some special ritual to cure him. Na'aman felt it was an affront to his honor that Elisha just sent a message to do something so ordinary like swim in the Jordan River. He refused to comply with the prophet's instructions, until his men convinced him to do what the prophet said. Na'aman eventually bathed in the Jordan, whereupon he was completely healed.

This is a man who suffered for many years from a painful and embarrassing condition – and yet he refused to try a method of treatment prescribed by a renowned prophet, all because of his pride. When a person feels compelled to protect his ego, he acts against his own best interests, and causes himself great harm.

There are so many examples of this unfortunate and tragic phenomenon. Relationships and partnerships are torn apart because people refuse to undertake relatively simple measures to accommodate each other. Destructive conflicts endure and wreak havoc upon families and communities because both parties persist and refuse to back down. People lose their jobs because their pride prevents them from doing their work properly. When pride becomes our highest priority, we are willing to sacrifice everything else, and we end up destroying ourselves.

This is one lesson we can learn from the Torah's discussion of Sara'at – the need to avoid self-destructive arrogance. Rather than allow our pride to ruin our lives, let us remain humble, respect other people and their wishes, and be willing and open to seek help when we need it.

Setting Speech Free



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

We must understand why the *metzora*, one afflicted with the skin condition called *tzara'as*, is treated so much more harshly than any other impure person. The Torah says, "He shall dwell alone, he shall reside outside the camp" (Vayikra 13:46). He must not only stay away from the Mishkan and the camp of the *levi'im*, but must also stay away from any Jewish settlement. He must even stay away from other impure individuals! Why is the *metzora* treated even more severely than one who has come into contact with a dead body, whose impurity is even stronger? Why does the *metzora* have no place in any Jewish community?

The Sfas Emes explains that Hashem sends a person *tzara'as* not only for misusing his power of speech, but also for his failure to use his power of speech for the good, by speaking words of guidance and encouragement to other people. Such a person makes himself mute and cuts himself off from others.

The Sfas Emes also explains that in order to rectify the words the *metzora* should not have said, as well as the good words he left unsaid, he must bring two live, pure birds to the Mishkan (Vayikra 14:4). The kohein slaughters one bird and sets the other one free (ibid. 5, 7). Rashi explains that the *metzora* offers birds because it is the nature of birds to chirp and chatter, and the *metzora* must atone for his inappropriate chatter.

But the Sfas Emes takes this idea a step further and teaches that the slaughtered bird corresponds to the inappropriate chatter which we must eliminate from our lives. We must slaughter words of gossip and idle criticism. We must slaughter the habit of speaking in shul. We must slaughter hurtful words toward those in

our family, subordinates at work, and friends.

And the live bird, which is set free, corresponds to the words of kindness, prayer, Torah, and encouragement that the *metzora* had bottled up inside but which he should have set free, lest he find himself at the end of his days looking back on a life of "I was mute with silence..." Rather, if one sees another person who could use some encouragement, who would feel more connected to Yiddishkeit if he heard a Torah idea, or if one is tired but his or her spouse could use a kind word, one should let those positive words fly. He must give them free expression and not hold them back.

It is very easy to make a mistake and think that slaughtering negative speech means that one should be silent. Many people believe that the Chofetz Chaim, *zt'l*, who wrote the classic sefer on the laws of lashon hara, must have been a very quiet person. After all, when one has learned all of the halachos, it is hard to imagine what he is permitted to speak about! But the Sfas Emes teaches us that the opposite is the case. We must empty our mouths of negative, hurtful speech in order to make room for the mouth's true purpose, as a vessel for words of prayer, Torah, and encouragement. I have met people who have seen the Chofetz Chaim, *zt'l* and they have testified, as is often quoted in seforim, that the Chofetz Chaim was a very gregarious person. He was very friendly and enjoyed talking with people. Slaughtering bad speech does not mean being silent. To the contrary, by emptying our mouths from the bad, we make room for the good.

The seforim *hakedoshim* teach that the essence of the Egyptian experience was that speech was in exile. That is why it

was only after the king of Egypt died did the pasuk say, "the Jewish people groaned from the labor and cried out, and their cry ascended to G-d from the labor" (Shmos 2:23). The word for Pharaoh, פרעה, has the same letters as פה רע, evil mouth. That is because the essential point of Egypt was to use speech, which is meant to express the pinnacle of what makes us human, for evil. When Pharaoh died, our mouths began to open up in prayer. That was when our "cry ascending to G-d."

When we refuse to allow our bodily desires and the evil inclination to limit our soul's expression through positive speech, we feel the truth of Dovid Hamelech's words: "Take my soul out of confinement in order that it give thanks to Your Name" (Tehillim 142:8). Freeing up the soul to speak words of holiness, kindness and encouragement allows it express its true essence.

We can now understand why the Torah is so strict with a *metzora*, decreeing that he must completely seclude himself outside of any Jewish community. What is the nature of a Jewish community? It is made up of shuls, houses of Torah study, and marketplaces. All of these are venues for the proper use of speech. We use shuls for prayer, houses of study to expound on the meaning of the Torah, and marketplaces for productive and mutually beneficial transactions between Jews. In the marketplace, one person takes note of another and offers words of encouragement and constructive advice. But by closing himself off with selfishness, negativity and jealousy, the *metzora* has separated himself from the essence of what a Jewish community is. That is why the only type of ritually impure person who must completely separate from the community is the *metzora*. His way of life is diametrically opposed to the Jewish camp.

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What Shames You Most: The Story of the 4 Lepers In Our Own Lives



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

The seventh chapter of Kings II tells a fascinating story, about the “four lepers.” The story takes place during the First Temple era when the Syrian Army swept down on the Northern Kingdom of Israel and laid siege to the city of Samaria (Shomron).

The famine was horrendous, people were resorting to cannibalism. One day the king of Israel, Jehoram (Yehoram), was walking along the inner walls of the city when a woman called to him, saying: “Your majesty, please help me.” The king answered, “What is the matter?” The woman said, “My neighbor came to me, and said, ‘Come, let us eat your [dead] son today, and then tomorrow we will eat my [dead] son.’ So we cooked my son, and ate him. But then the next day when I said to her, ‘Now let us eat your [dead] son.’ But she refused, and has hidden her son from me [in order to have him for herself].”

Jehoram, the king, was a fickle man. He blamed the great Jewish prophet of the time, Elisha, for his troubles, and had issued an edict of death against him. Jehoram even followed his soldier to Elisha’s quarters, to observe the arrest and execution. But instead of killing him, the king was confronted with a prophecy from Elisha declaring that G-d would provide deliverance for Israel the very next day.

It is at this point where the narrative shifts from what’s happening inside the city walls to a scene outside the city walls—and this is where the haftorah of Tazria-Metzora begins—where four lepers are both starving and quarantined because they are lepers and all lepers were quarantined outside of the city.

“Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, ‘Why are we sitting here until we die? If we say, ‘We will enter the city,’ the famine is

in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now, therefore, come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall only die.” (2 Kings 7:3-4)

They had at that point three options: 1) They could march back to the city that quarantined them in the first place, and try to get in. But what would be the point? There wasn’t any food inside the city. 2) They could march forward where the Syrian Army was encamped. The Syrians had plenty of food. But if the lepers did that, they might be killed on sight, because they were both lepers and from the enemy. 3) They could just sit there outside the walls of the city, and die from starvation without complication.

It was out of this deep distress that they said to each other: “Why just sit here until we die?”

The four lepers chose to get up and march directly to the camp of the Syrian army. In the evening hours, they marched toward the Syrian camp.

It was then that something extraordinary occurred.

The Syrian troops imagined that they heard the noise of chariots, the sound of pounding of hundreds of horses’ hooves. They were convinced they could hear the clashing of thousands of swords, the vanguard of an enemy army on the offensive. The Syrian army panicked and abandoned their camp, leaving their tents, armor, horses, chariots, and all their food behind. In their perception, the Jews hired the Egyptian and Hittite armies to attack them. They fled for their lives.

“And the lepers came to the edge of the camp, and they entered one tent, and they ate and they drank, and they carried off silver and gold and garments and they hid them; then they

returned and entered another tent, and they carried items from there also and went and hid them.” (Kings II 7:8)

But then they experience a change of heart: “And they said to each other, ‘We are not acting properly. Today is a day of good news, and we are being quiet about it. If we wait till the morning light, then we will have sinned. Now, therefore, let us go and tell what we have learned at the King’s household.’” (7:9)

The lepers notified the guard at the gate of the city about the news. The gatekeeper had a hard time convincing the king that the Syrians had actually left and were not planning an ambush, but after sending some of his soldiers first, news came back to the monarch that indeed the Syrians have left behind all their belongings and enormous quantities of food.

There was a mad rush. The people ran out of the city to fetch the food of the Syrians. The prophecy of Elisha was fulfilled: A seah of wheat flour and two seah of barley were sold for a minimal shekel.

The king’s right-hand man, who had mocked Elisha the day before when the prophet foretold a miraculous deliverance, was assigned to patrol the gates and was trampled to death by the people who were rushing out to buy food at low prices. Elisha’s words to him, “you will see it but not eat it,” came to fruition.

Sometimes we feel stuck in life. We find ourselves between a rock and a hardball. All options seem bleak. The worst thing to do in such a situation is to remain in one place. You must stand up and move. You must make a change; do something. Anything. But move forward. Even though you think you are subjecting yourself to further disaster, just making that move can transform your reality and you may discover an unexpected result that can alter your entire situation.

Tazria-Metzorah: Mazal Tov!



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpia, OU-NCSY

The *tzadik* Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz, zy'a, was beloved for his sense of humor, holy laughter, and frank and pithy observations. A brilliant *talmid chacham*, he was one of the primary disciples of the Chozeh of Lublin, and his deep Torah insights are collected in the sefer *Zera Kodesh*.

One night, Rebbe Naftali was traveling *baderech*, on the road, and stopped at a *kretchma*, an inn, to rest. There, a Jewish wedding party was in full swing, with drinking, eating, singing and dancing. Rebbe Naftali noticed, however, that the bride seemed unhappy and downcast. The Ropshitzer was renowned as a master *badchan*, a wedding entertainer, full of spontaneous songs, puns and plays on words, all *remazim* and codes for inspirational Torah wisdom.

Reb Naftali walked right into the party, stepped up onto a chair and began to regale the bride and groom with creative songs and rapid-fire jokes woven with meaningful words and overflowing blessings. His rhymes and *grammen* revealed so much talent, depth and humor that all the guests were spellbound, clapping along and laughing out loud. The bride, too, became swept up in the exhilarating atmosphere of joy, hilarity and spiritual elevation, and soon she and the entire wedding party and guests were shaking with laughter, and dancing in circles of Divine ecstasy deep into the night. It was as if Mashiach had arrived and there was no sadness in all the world.

At midnight, on the other side of town, Reb Naftali's dear Rebbe, the Chozeh, awoke to sit on the floor, recite the heartrending lamentations of *Tikun Chatzos* and express the pain of Am Yisrael's exile. However, when he began the contemplative recitation, he felt there was interference with the flow, something preventing his supplications from reaching their intended

Heavenly destination. Strangely enough, he wasn't able to summon a feeling of mourning or pain at all. Surprised by this, he closed his eyes and ascended to a higher level of inner vision and clairvoyance. In this state he perceived the wedding celebrations, with Reb Naftali wielding his holy *badchanus* and lifting everyone up with Heavenly joy.

The Chozeh perceived that in the Upper Worlds there was also such a brilliant light of *simchah* and laughter, that his *avodah* of *Tikun Chatzos* was completely outshone and swallowed up in it. It was as if the *Ribbono shel Olam* was Himself exuberantly celebrating, and there were no *dinim* at all over which to be disturbed, nor exiles to mourn.

On that night the Chozeh came to a new understanding of the vast power of *simchah*.



Our sedra contains laws of *tumah v'taharah*, ritual impurity and purity, including the process and procedure of identifying *nega'im*, lesions of *tzaraas*, a 'spiritual disease' that could afflict people's bodies, clothing or homes. If a suspicious blotch appeared on the skin or surface of ones' belongings, the *kohen* would examine it to determine if the affliction was *tzaraas*. If so, it rendered the individual *tamei* and liable to quarantine, an 'exile' of sorts.

וביום הראות בו בשר חי יטמא

On the day upon which living,
healthy flesh appears in it, he
shall become *tameh* (13:14).

Rashi says the Torah specifically uses the term *וביום*, "on the day", to teach us that there is 'a day' when the *kohen* ought to examine potential cases of *tzaraas*, and there is 'a day' when the *Kohen* should refrain from examining them. We learn from this that *חֵתָן נֹתְנִין לוֹ כָּל שְׂבַעַת יְמֵי*, "A *chasan* is exempt from having a *nega* examined throughout

his *sheva brachos*, the joyful seven days of his wedding feast — whether on his skin, his garments, or his house."

Rashi further explains that on *Yamim Tovim* all are exempt from having lesions examined. Even though the *nega* might be one that could be seen as problematic, the *Kohen* refrains from looking at it. This is to allow us undisturbed and uninterrupted *simchas Yom tov*.

The legendary *mechanech* and rosh *yeshivah* of Darchei Torah, Rav Yaakov Bender *shlit'a*, shares a remarkable insight. While the presence of a potential *nega* seems to be an incontrovertible, objective reality, we see from the above exemptions, that there is a higher reality, in which undeniable facts are subject to the perspective of *Rachmana*, the Merciful One Himself.

Nega'im appeared as the result of an individual speaking inappropriately, in a forbidden or insensitive manner. One who was afflicted with a *tzaraas* had belittled or disparaged someone, causing ill will or pain. Rashi's understanding of the power of *simchah* is taught to us in the parsha of *negaim* for a reason. By first showing us the potential negative effects of *lashon ha-ra*, the Torah is motivating us to repair the destruction we have done, and instructing us to be sensitive to others by seeing their higher reality and considering their experience, perspective and needs. By clearing away disruptions to the joy of meaningful celebrations — by outshining the potential 'exile' of *tzaraas* with transcendent happiness — the *halacha* focuses our attention on the redemptive *simchah* of *Yiddishkeit*.

כל המשמח חתן וכלה כאילו בנה
אחת מחורבות ירושלים.

"Anyone who brings joy to a *chasan* and *kallah*, is, as it were, rebuilding one of the ruins of *Yerushalayim*." (Berachos 6b)

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Seeing ‘Eye To Eye’

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

One of the sins that causes a person to experience tzarat, is ‘tzar ayin’, a ‘stingy eye.’ This is one of the reasons, that before proclaiming a house affected by tzarat, all the items must be emptied from the house. In this way, the owner will feel the embarrassment of denying owning a certain item, just because they were stingy and did not want to share. What is the ‘tzar ayin’ and how can we work on overcoming this middah.

In examining the opposite of a ‘narrow eye’ we can gain a deeper insight into what this negative middah entails. Mishnah in Avot lists the three main qualities that Avraham Avinu possessed, and by contrast, the opposite of these middot, that Bilam had. The special middot were an ‘ayin tova, ruach nemucha, and nefesh sheflela.’ Rabbenu Yonah explains, that ‘ayin tova’ is one who has the quality of unbridled giving, as seen by giving the three tasty tongues for the angels to eat. R. Mattiyahu Salomon in Matnat Chayim expounds on this idea. Avraham Avinu was not just filling a need, rather, he was trying to give to each person what would make them happy. Instead of slaughtering one cow, and giving each different parts of the animal, he slaughtered three cows, to give each one the tastiest part. Maharal



Only one who has humility has the ability to see the needs of others, and is able to step outside of self, to provide these needs.

explains that when one wants the best for another person, this is a demonstration of ‘ayin tova’. Usually, when giving, it is to assuage our conscious, that a person is not suffering; this is considered a ‘good heart’. An ayin tova, is focused on the needs of the other person, assuring that they are receiving the best. The three qualities are really interconnected. Only one who has humility has the ability to see the needs of others, and is able to step outside of self, to provide these needs.

R. Nissin Alpert suggests that the process of purification of the Metzora is meant to work on rectifying these very middot in a person. First and foremost, a person has to go to the Kohen, not that the Kohen is brought to him; this is the first step in humility. One has to recognize, that they can’t cure themselves, that they are in need of others. Further, the person says

‘like a nega I have seen in my house.’ They need to realize that their knowledge is limited, and are in need of someone greater than themselves to see the situation. In coming to the Kohen, one is open to learn about their spiritual malady, and begin to work on fixing it.

Once a person has begun diminishing their ego, they can then begin to work on having a ‘good eye’ towards others. A key factor is developing this trait, notes R. Schorr in Halekach Vehalebuv is one’s ability to show gratitude to others. When one can appreciate all the kindness done for them, one can then learn to reciprocate, and do specific kindnesses for others. Life is one long laboratory of work on making ourselves worthy of being the students of Avraham Avinu.

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We see from the foregoing that it is not enough to slaughter negative speech. We must set the live, pure bird free by expressing words of prayer, Torah, love, encouragement, and support for those around us. That way, we allow our soul

to truly express itself and we redeem the power of speech from exile. May we merit to see the fulfillment of Dovid Hamelech’s prayer, “Take my soul out of confinement in order that it give thanks to Your Name”

so that we can see be part of the Jewish people in the fullest sense.

“Let Me Not Lose You Both”



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

The first time the root **אָשַׁכַּל** appears in the Torah was when Rivka hastened to send Yaakov away “until your brother’s anger has subsided” after Esav threatened to kill him for stealing the blessings. **לָמָּה אָשַׁכַּל גַּם־שָׁנִיכֶם** “Why should I lose you both in one day?” asked the woman, whose voice is barely heard in the Torah.

Regarding the interpretation of **אָשַׁכַּל**, Rabbi Hirsch said, “אָשַׁכַּל like the grape! Perhaps **אשכל** does not mean the two berries, but rather the short stem on which the berries sit. As long as the berries are on it, you can not see the branches. It only becomes visible when it is deprived of the berries. A woman with many sons is like a fruitful vine (**אָשַׁכַּל**): When her children die, she stands there like the bare grape branches from which the berries are picked.”

Why does Rivka say that she will lose two sons? If Esav kills Yaakov, she will lose only one son?! Obviously, Rivka will not mourn her motherhood or her dead son. She will mourn the brotherhood that died.

Life, she knows, is a communion between different people, it is a relationship. “Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of disciples and they all died between Passover and Atzeret.” The relationship is dead, the ability to live side by side with disagreement.

So what do you do so that Mother does not cry? That mother earth does not cry?!

Leprosy is the terrible separation of a sister from her brother. **אנא אל נא רפא נא לה** “G-d, please heal her!” The brothers Moshe and Aaron prayed for their sister Miriam. They prayed for the mother, Yocheved, that she would not have to mourn: “Let her not be like a stillborn child, coming out of the womb with half-eaten flesh!”... Brothers, pray for their mother.

And this is where the Kohen will arrive. Only he, with his pure look (“Let the priest examine the affection”), with his lips that say only good, the lips of a Kohen, can bring the leper back to the camp.

מי האיש הזה, החפץ חיים, אוהב הימים, רואה רק טוב? נוצר לשונו מרע? מבקש שלום ורודף אחריו?

In this year, we will all be a kingdom of Kohanim. In the 75th year of the State of Israel, in the year of the Gematria, of “כהן”, we will think only of a mother who, although she gave birth to children who are so different, who quarrel so much, who are blessed so differently, she does not want the brotherhood between them to be lost one day.

Let us purify the brotherhood, let us pray for the mother as only Aharon HaKohen can pray, as one prays in the month of Ziv, Iyar:

אנא אל נא רפא נא לה בהראות לה נועם זיוון. אז תתחזק ותתרפא והיתה לה שמחת עולם

“Please God, heal her by showing her the pleasantness of Your splendor.” He should yearn for God to reveal a spark of the pleasantness of His splendor and the beauty of His strength even in his own heart, as he stands in this holy space.

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May we speak to all with sensitivity, goodness and honor and open ourselves to feel the sufferings of exile. And may we yet be like holy *badchanim*, and cause to be heard, in the cities of Yehudah and the streets of Yerushalayim, the sound of happiness and laughter of rejoicing — the exuberant voice

of the *Chosson*, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and the exultant voice of the *Kallah*, Klal Yisrael.



In honor of the Shabbos Sheva Brachos of our daughter Tiferet and her *chosson*, Ahron Finkel.

שתהי' בשעה טובה ומוצלחת ויבנו בית בישראל בנין עדי עד על יסודי התורה והמצוה כפי שהם מוארים במאור שבתורה זוהי תורת החסידות. בברכת מזל טוב מזל טוב!

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin

balashon.com

Author of the forthcoming book *Kohelet: A Map to Eden* (Maggid)

Parashat Tazria contains the names of a number of afflictions, for example:

אָדָם כִּי־יִהְיֶה בְעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ שְׂאֵת
או־סִפְחַת או־בְּהָרַת וְהָיָה בְעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ
לִנְגַע צָרְעַת וְהוּבָא אֶל־אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן...

“When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of his body, it shall be reported to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests.” (Vayikra 13:2)

In this verse, there are four. All follow the same pattern, a root followed by the letter ת, creating the name of the affliction. So we see:

- שְׂאֵת – “swelling”, from the root שׂא – “to elevate”
- סִפְחַת – “rash, scab”, from the root ספח – “to erupt”
- בְּהָרַת – “discoloration, bright spot”, from the root בהר – “to brighten”

- צָרְעַת – a skin affliction frequently translated as “leprosy”, possibly from the root צרע – “to throw down”

Other conditions mentioned in the parasha include:

- צָרָבָה – “inflammation”, from the root צרב – “to burn” (13:23) (in modern Hebrew this refers to heartburn)
- גִּבְחָת and קִרְחָת – bald spots on the front or back of the head, from the roots קרח – “to be bald” and גבה, possibly from a root meaning “to be high” (13:42) (related to גבה)


This pattern of creating afflictions and diseases was continued in the modern era during Hebrew’s revival by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, and in particular by his colleague the doctor Rabbi Aharon Meir Mazia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They coined such terms as:

- צִהָבָה – jaundice, from the root צהב – “to be yellow”
- אֲדָמָה – rubella, from the root אדם – “to be red”
- כְּלָבָה – rabies, from כָּלַב – “dog”
- נִזְלָה – runny nose, from the root נזל – “to drip”

One well known Hebrew word for a disease is שִׁפְעָה – “influenza, flu.” It was also coined around this time. However, its origin might not seem as obvious as the terms mentioned above.

In this case, it was a calque (a loan translation) from the European languages that used the word “influenza” to describe the disease. This word originated in Latin and came from an astrological belief that the disease was “influenced” by the stars. Following this origin, in Hebrew it was called שִׁפְעָה, from the verb השפיע – “to influence.”

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

Find two cases where a plague is called “צָרְעַת” but the Kohen does NOT declare “טָמֵא” (impure).

Answer to the Parsha Riddle


every one of us

If such compassion is shown to a Metzora, how much more so does Hashem have concern for each and contents from being declared “טָמֵא”,

that the Kohen orders a house to be emptied of its contents before inspection, to save the Metzora’s property is further demonstrated by the fact (a) an opportunity for the owner to reflect and do teshuvah, and (b) shows concern for a chance for the owner to do teshuvah. By giving a week of quarantine, Hashem gives has been declared as “טָמֵא” by the Kohen it would have to be burnt. This would not give In the case of a garment, the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh (13:50) explains that once a garment after examining the affliction, shall isolate the affected article for seven days. (13:49-50) green or deep red, it is the plague of Tzaraat. It shall be shown to the Kohen and the Kohen, If the plague in the cloth or the skin, in the warp or the woof, or in any article of skin, is deep (b) when Tzaraat initially appears on a garment /cloth

If the Kohen sees that the Tzaraat has covered the whole body—he shall pronounce as pure (a) when Tzaraat covers the whole body

the affected person, who is pure from having turned all white. (13:13)



THIS WEEK in Jewish History

Iyar 1, 2448 (1313 BCE): The first census of Israelites was taken by Moshe. 603,550 men over age 20 translates to a total population of 2.5-3 million people.

April 23, 1982: The IDF forcibly evacuated the Jewish settlement of Yamit per the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, painfully actualizing the concept of “land for peace.”

April 24, 1920: Sir Herbert Samuel, a prominent British Jew, was appointed the first High Commissioner of Palestine.

Iyar 4: Yom HaZikaron (Remembrance Day for Fallen Israeli Soldiers). People visit military cemeteries and the country comes to a halt during a 2-minute siren.

Iyar 5, 5708 (1948): At a ceremony, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the independent state of Israel. Since then, Yom HaAtzmaut (Independence Day) is celebrated on Iyar 5.

Iyar 6, 5104 (1344): Yahrzeit of Rabbi Levi ben Gershom (Rablag), philosopher, author, astronomer and inventor of the “Jacob’s Staff” and the “camera obscura.”

Iyar 7, 3426 (335 BCE): New walls built around Jerusalem by Nechemiah dedicated with great joy nearly 88 years after they were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

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Beth David Synagogue
Congregation Agudath Sholom
Young Israel of West Hartford

FLORIDA

Beth Israel Congregation
Hebrew Academy RASG
PlayHard PrayHard
Congregation Torah Ohr
Sha'arei Bina Torah Academy for Girls
Young Israel of Hollywood-Ft. Lauderdale

GEORGIA

Congregation Beth Jacob
Congregation Ohr HaTorah

HAWAII

Kehilat Olam Ejad Ganim

ILLINOIS

Mizrachi-Religious Zionists of Chicago

MARYLAND

Kemp Mill Synagogue
Pikesville Jewish Congregation
Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation

MASSACHUSETTS

Congregation Beth El Atereth Israel
Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe
Congregation Shaarei Tefillah
Young Israel of Brookline

MICHIGAN

Young Israel of Oak Park
Young Israel of Southfield
Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe

MINNESOTA

Congregation Darchei Noam

MISSOURI

Yeshivat Kadimah High School Nusach
Hari B'nai Zion Congregation
Young Israel of St. Louis

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Hillel at Dartmouth

NEW JERSEY

Ahavas Achim
Volunteer Chaplain Middlesex County
Congregation AABJ&D
Congregation Adath Israel of the JEC
National Council of Young Israel
Congregation Ahavat Achim
Congregation Ahavath Torah
Congregation Brothers of Israel
Congregation Darchei Noam of Fair Lawn
Congregation Etz Chaim of Livingston
Congregation Israel of Springfield
Congregation Ohr Torah
Congregation Sons of Israel of Cherry Hill
Kehilat Keshet
Ma Tov Day Camp
Ohav Emeth
Pal Foundation
Shomrei Torah of Fair Lawn
Synagogue of the Suburban Torah Center
Yavneh Academy
National Council of Young Israel
Young Israel of Teaneck

NEW YORK

Beis Community
Congregation Anshei Shalom
Congregation B'nai Tzedek
Congregation Bais Tefilah of Woodmere
Congregation Beth Sholom
Ramaz
Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls
MTA – Yeshiva University
High School for Boys
Young Israel of Merrick
Congregation Beth Torah
Congregation Etz Chaim of
Kew Gardens Hills
Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun
Congregation Ohab Zedek
Great Neck Synagogue
Iranian Jewish Center/Beth
Hadassah Synagogue
Irving Place Minyan
Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach
Kehilath Jershurun
Kingsway Jewish Center
Lincoln Square Synagogue

Merkaz Yisrael of Marine Park
North Shore Hebrew Academy
Young Israel of Merrick
NYC Department of Correction
OU-JLIC at Binghamton University
OU-JLIC at Cornell University
Queens Jewish Center
Stars of Israel Academy
The Jewish Center
The Riverdale Minyan
Vaad of Chevra Kadisha
West Side Institutional Synagogue
Yeshiva University High School for Girls
Young Israel of Hillcrest
Young Israel of Jamaica Estates
Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst
Young Israel of New Rochelle
Young Israel of North Woodmere
Young Israel of Oceanside
Young Israel of Scarsdale
Young Israel of Woodmere

OHIO

Beachwood Kehilla
Congregation Sha'arei Torah
Congregation Torat Emet
Green Road Synagogue
Fuchs Mizrachi School
Heights Jewish Center

PENNSYLVANIA

Shaare Torah Congregation

SOUTH CAROLINA

Brith Sholom Beth Israel
Congregation Dor Tikvah

TENNESSEE

Baron Hirsch Congregation

TEXAS

Mayerland Minyan Synagogue
Robert M. Beren Academy
United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston

VIRGINIA

Keneseth Beth Israel

WASHINGTON

Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath
Northwest Yeshiva High School
Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation

URUGUAY

Comunidad Yavne Uruguay

VENEZUELA

CARACAS

Ashkenazi Kehilla
Mizrachi Venezuela



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