



הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY



PARSHAT METZORA
SHABBAT HAGADOL
5782 • 2022








ISRAEL
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וְרַחֵץ אֶת בְּשׂוּרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְטָהַר
וַיִּקְרָא יְיָ, ב









Mikva in Khirbet Ashun, near Modiin

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Never Speaking Lashon Hara

A 100% foolproof strategy



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrahi

The amazing phenomenon of the disease of צרעת, *tzara'at*, which we encounter in this and last week's Parshiot, is indeed extraordinary. Loosely translated, it means leprosy, but it is something much more sophisticated. Leprosy affects only the human body, while צרעת affects not only the skin, scalp and hair, but also, incredibly, the clothing and even the walls of the house. The unusual malaise is of an apparently metaphysical nature and therefore the sages search for a spiritual source.

Moreover, the word most often used in the Torah to describe the illness צרעת is the Hebrew word נגע – affliction.¹ Most often, points out Rabbi S.R. Hirsch in his commentary to Shemot 13:2, this term is used in the Tanakh to refer to tribulations of Divine origin - a heavenly decree. A famous example is the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, where Hashem informs Moshe:

‘עוד נגע אחד אביא על פרעה ועל מצרים...’

One more affliction I will visit on Pharaoh and Egypt. (Shemot 11:1)

It is clear, then, both the use of the specific word נגע to describe the צרעת and the unusual phenomenon of the צרעת הבגדים – Infestation of the clothes and the walls of the house – clearly indicates a spiritual phenomenon of Divine design.

So, what is the spiritual obstacle and moral failure that our sages consider to

be the main cause of this unusual disease? Our Sages emphasize in several places that מוציא שם רע and לשון הרע – speaking negatively about others and defaming them – are the culprits.²

As for slander, our Sages find a reference to it in the word that is used only once in the entire Chumash to describe the person afflicted with the disease, and it is even the name of this week's parasha - מצורע, *metzora*. The famous Talmudic Sage Reish Lakhish says, in *Masechet Erchin* 15b, that the word מצורע is an acronym for מוציא שם רע (שם) - slander. So it is clear that negative statements and defamation of others are the cause of this and so many other evils of society.

How can we avoid this terrible sin and destructive behavior?

I would like to propose two foolproof strategies that offer comprehensive solutions.

Foolproof Strategy #1

The first foolproof strategy never to speak ill is simply not to speak at all. In Israel, there is a monastery known as "The Monastery of the Silent". The way those who live in this monastery serve spiritually is never to speak. Speech can be negative, hurtful, harmful and blasphemous. The way to avoid all this is to never speak. No speaking, no sinning – foolproof. The problem, of course, is that this is not consistent with the nature of the Torah as a "Torat Chaim" – a Torah of life. At its core, our Torah is based

on the principle of "derech eretz" that precedes Torah – normative living and healthy interpersonal relationships that forge bonds of kinship between people and together form a functioning and caring society. This is done through talking and speaking, the basic mode of communication and human interaction. As foolproof as this solution may be, it is not the solution, since the Torah is based on derech eretz, and is therefore inconsistent with the Torah values.³

So, we need a different strategy!

Foolproof Strategy #2

There is another solution that is completely in line with the values of the Torah. The way never to speak ill of anyone is simply not to THINK badly of anyone. If we judge people unfavorably and think negatively about them, it is only a matter of time before the negativity will eventually be expressed in one way or another. For this reason, the Sages have always emphasized the fundamental principle of judging others favorably. Many Mishnayot and Talmudic teachings emphasize that one should never judge

anyone until one has been in their place; that one should always judge others favorably; and that if we judge others favorably, we will be judged favorably. Incredibly, even a dayan – a judge – who must judge people's intentions and actions and, if necessary, impose harsh punishments, is urged to judge that very person favorably after the conclusion of the judgment and to see them in a positive light.⁴ Remarkable.

This requirement to think positively of others is based on the quality of having a good eye and a good heart. The person who sees the world through a positive lens will strive to see the positive in every situation and in every person – in one's self, in those closest to us, in society, and in life in general. If we think positively about people and create a world of appreciation and blessing in the mental constructs of our minds, this will translate into positive expressions toward everyone around us.

In short, the only way not to ever speak ill of others is never to think ill of them. Like all important things in life, this requires spiritual sensitivity, deep introspection,

and a single-minded pursuit of personal growth.

On this Shabbat HaGadol – the Shabbat before the great chag of Pesach --may we all constantly strive to live a life of spiritual greatness.

1. The masechet that deals with all the laws of tzara'at is masechet נגעים, in which the same word is used to describe all the various expressions of tzara'at.
2. The passuk in Devarim 24:8-9, clearly indicates that the sin of Lashon Hara is the cause of the illness. The Midrash Sifra on the passuk emphasizes this as does Masechet Erchin 15, to name a few.
3. The concept of a תענית דיבור is not mentioned in the Talmud, but it has been spoken of in Kabbalistic sources in recent centuries. However, this applies only to certain times and for a limited period of time - not to normal everyday life.
4. See Avot 1:8.



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הוא הִיא אומה, עֲשֵׂה רְצוֹנוֹ כְּרְצוֹנָהּ, כְּדִי שִׁיעֲשֶׂה רְצוֹנָהּ כְּרְצוֹנוֹ. בְּטוֹל רְצוֹנָהּ מִפְּנֵי רְצוֹנוֹ, כְּדִי שִׁיבְטֹל רְצוֹן אֲחֵרִים מִפְּנֵי רְצוֹנָהּ. (אבות ב:ד)

Last week we learned about the importance of our intentions. The Mishnah in the beginning of the second perek of Avot relates to another aspect of our psyche — our will.

Rabban Gamliel (the son of Rebbi Yehuda Hanasi) encourages us to “Make His will as your own so that He will make yours as His” and to “Nullify your will before His so that He will nullify the will of others before yours.”

Identification

We should aim to not only nullify our will before Hashem's, but also transform our will to match His. Instead of (just) submitting to Hashem's will, we should *identify* with it; in addition to fulfilling Hashem's will, we should want what He “wants”. We should aim to value what He “values” and feel what He “feels” about what we experience in this world.

We can learn what this means from Pinchas, who Hashem described as someone who was “*kano et kinati*.” (Baidbar 25:11) Pinchas was more than just someone who took action in response to sin. His reaction was deeper — it was visceral. He felt the appropriate pain and jealousy one who identifies with Hashem ought to feel.

Rav Yechezkel Weinfeld *shlit”a* uses this idea to explain Rav Shimon Bar Yochai's surprising interpretation of the *pasuk* (in the second parsha of *k'riat shema*) that mentions working the fields. (Devarim 11:14) Rav Shimon Bar Yochai encouraged learning all day while relying on Hashem to provide for us without having to work the field. He explains the *pasuk* that seems to endorse such work as referring to a time when people are not “*oskim b'retzono shel Makom* (involved in the will of G-d).”

Tosfot points out that the perek the above *pasuk* appears within begins by describing people fulfilling *mitzvot* and continues by describing Hashem's reward to them for this fulfillment. How could this parsha be understood as referring to people who are not *oskim b'retzono shel Makom*? Tosfot explains

that although the parsha refers to people who fulfill Hashem's will, they are not “*osin retzono*” completely. What does this mean? What are they lacking?

Rav Weinfeld explains that the parsha refers to people who fulfill the commandments and act in line with Hashem's will, but have not yet succeeded at making Hashem's will their own.

They are not yet “*osin retzono shel Makom*.” Their incomplete reward mirrors their incomplete *avodah*. Hashem rewards them for their fulfillment of *mitzvot* by supporting their work in the field, but they are still required to exert effort.

The Form — Passionate Heart and Soul

Identification with Hashem's will impacts both the form and breadth of our *avodat Hashem*.

Syncing our will with Hashem's ensures that when we fulfill Hashem's will, we do so with a full heart. This is how the Ramban explains the *pasuk* “And you shall serve Him with all your heart.” (Devarim 11:13) When fulfilling *mitzvot*, we should be fully invested in our *avodat Hashem* and act in a wholehearted way. The Ramban expresses this idea in a second context — his explanation for why the Torah tells of Avraham running (“*ratz*”) to serve his three guests. The Ramban explains that the Torah wants us to appreciate Avraham's passion for chessed. (Bereishit 18:7) He did not just *do* it, he *ran* to do it.

We see the relationship between “running” and “will” through the relationship between the Hebrew word for will — *ratzon*, and the abbreviated version of that word used to describe running — *ratz*. Rav Yehuda Ben Teima links the two in his statement later in Avot (5:20), encouraging us to “run (*ratz*) like a gazelle to fulfill the Will (*ratzon*) of your Father in Heaven.”

Breadth — What Hashem Wants

Having Hashem's *ratzon* as our own means that we are passionate about not just

commandments, but about *everything* Hashem “wants.” This should express itself in the way we seek to fulfill Hashem's will — both what He made explicit, and what we infer by “reading between the lines.”

The Mesillat Yesharim (18) explains that ideally, one should relate to Hashem the same way people relate to others they love and care deeply about. One who cares about another person will prioritize not only the other's explicit requests; they will also try to anticipate and facilitate whatever might make the other happy.

We see this idea in Avraham's actions at the *Akeidah*. After Hashem tells him to spare Yitzchak's life, he looks for something else to sacrifice (Bereishit 22:13). Avraham figures that Hashem would want him to sacrifice something, so, even though he was not *commanded* to do so, he *seeks* the opportunity. Understandably, Hashem blessed Avraham *only after* he offered this voluntary sacrifice. The *berachot* are given to Avraham because he is not just a loyal servant, but also one who loves Hashem.

This highlights the need to reflect not just upon what Hashem wants from the world in general, but also what he wants from *us specifically*. The Chatam Sofer uses this idea to explain the surprising statement of the Gemara (Yevamot 108b) that “one who says that they have only Torah, lacks *even Torah*.” The Chatam Sofer explains that Torah, as eternal and universal, can teach only the general responsibilities all Jews have at all times.

A person who identifies with Hashem's Will must go beyond that, by using the unique abilities and circumstances Hashem created him with and then places him in to appreciate how he, personally, is meant to best serve Him. Only one who does this *truly* has Torah. May we successfully sync our will with Hashem's in a way that brings us to identify with His goals and inspires us to serve him fully and comprehensively.

● Transcribed by Yedidyah Rosenswasser.

HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Shabbat HaGadol: Haftarah & Haggadah



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

Unlike the haftarot of the four parshiyot which are codified in the Mishnah and elaborated upon in the Talmud (Megillah 291-b), the haftarah for Shabbat HaGadol, the Shabbat preceding Chag HaPesach, is not mentioned in the Talmud. The custom to read from Malachi 3:4-24 dates back to the Middle Ages though it may have originally been read as the haftarah for parashat Tzav based on the Eretz-Yisrael triennial cycle for reading the Torah (opening with the parallel “mincha” offering). The Maharshal suggests that the name for this Shabbat, “Shabbat HaGadol” (the great shabbat), is related to this haftarah, beginning with the words (Malakhi 3:4), “And the offering of Yehuda and Jerusalem will be sweet to Hashem,” and concluding: “Behold, I will send you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the GREAT (HaGadol) AND AWESOME DAY OF HASHEM.” But the very choice of this haftara is problematic for a haftarah, by definition, is related to and complements the weekly Torah reading or the special maftir for special occasions. But on Shabbat HaGadol there is no special reading (maftir) from the Torah. Why, then, is the regular haftara that accompanies this week’s parasha (Metzora) from Melachim Bet 7:3-20, set aside in favor of a haftarah that has no connection with the parasha or clear connection to Pesach?

Post-facto, one may find still find connections between this week’s haftarah of “ve-arvah” (opening verse) and the upcoming festival of Pesach. One such connection may be found in the mysterious appearance of Eliyahu HaNavi, both at the conclusion of the haftarah and on the Seder night, as he comes to herald the final redemption. There are other connections as well that may be learned from this final prophecy of Malachi, the

final pesukim of prophecy in the Tanach as we approach the holiday recounting our first national *geulah*.

The farewell to prophecy depicted by Malachi reminds us of the first era of prophecy to the Jewish nation on the eve of Yetziat Mitzrayim, as we close the cycle of prophecy and await future opportunities. Malachi opens his prophecy with Hashem’s words of an abandoned father speaking to His beloved children who serve G-d in a perfunctory and disrespectful manner. The nation, kohanim included, living less than a hundred years after the rebuilding of the second Beit HaMikdash, have been indifferent to their misbehavior and disrespect in worshipping Hashem, “robbing Him” of due gifts of recognition. They have betrayed their G-d, their Jewish identity and their wives who have been cast aside in favor of the Samaritan women, “the daughter of the foreign god” as their wives covered “the altar of Hashem with tears.” The prophet then assures us that Hashem will eliminate the wicked in preparation for ultimate salvation as the haftarah begins – “Then the offering of Yehuda and Yerushalayim will be pleasing to Hashem as in the days of old and in previous years.” The prophet exhorts the nation for “veering away from My laws” and encourages them to “return to Me, and I will return to you,” reminding us of our cycle of exile, repentance, redemption, sin and exile. But he also provides us with the key to breaking this cycle and avoiding “*asher lo sam libo*” (not paying heed), with the words “*Zichru Torat Moshe avdi*” – “Remember the Torah of Moshe, my servant.” Herein lays a strong connection with the upcoming Pesach holiday when we actively remember the stories of Moshe and the commencement of Jewish identity recounting the narrative and

collective memory of *yetziat Mitzrayim*. The Rambam (*Hilchot Chametz Umatzah* 7:1) explains that the basis of “*mitzvat sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*” on the night of Pesach is the commandment *זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם ממצרים*” (*Shemot* 13:3), highlighting the active remembrance through speech.

As Malachi’s words end the era of prophecy, he reminds us through his rhetoric that we are not dependent on intangible ethereal communication to maintain a relationship with the Divine. We are enjoined to speak and teach “Torat Moshe,” perpetuating the prophecy of Moshe through the mitzvot of the Torah, particularly through parents relating to their children! The three final pesukim of the haftarah (Malakhi 3:22-24) echo in our hearts on the night of Pesach: “*Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant, which I commanded him at Chorev for all of Israel; the statutes and the judgments. Behold, I shall send to you Eliyahu the prophet, before the coming of the great and awesome day of Hashem. And he will return the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their father, lest I come and strike the land with a curse.*” Eliyahu, the (apparently) childless and zealous prophet, the prophet who hovers in ambiguities of time and space, will come to fill the void between generations and herald redemption. Perhaps that’s why he awaits by our doors on the Seder night – waiting to hear parents and children engaged in dynamic dialogue of Torat Moshe as they question and answer, excited by story and song. For when they do, he and we know that redemption may be revisited, accompanying us from the darkness of exile through the doors of exodus.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Kasher VeSameach!

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot

Question: I am ashkenazic, but I would like to get a talit without black stripes because I feel it looks nicer that way. Is this okay or is this a minhag that should not be changed?

Answer: The black stripes are meant to remind us of techeilet (Pri Megadim). Nevertheless, this is not an explicit minhag brought down by poskim. The custom to wear all white is based on kabbalah. I wear a talit with black stripes because I love to continue the previously accepted practices, but I do not think choosing to wear white would be considered changing a minhag.

Question: My wife teaches a drawing class for children. Can she teach a class during Chol Hamoed? Can she do the preparations (drawing) on Chol Hamoed necessary for the class?

Answer: She is allowed to give over the class because this is considered a need for children. Preparing the drawings in advance is more of an issue, and it would be best to have this done before chag. Nevertheless, if she does not prepare in advance and does need it for Chol Hamoed, she may draw to prepare.

Question: Can somebody who generally does not sell chametz gamur decide to buy chametz products this year (and sell them over Pesach) because he sees potential profit in these items with prices rising as a result of the war?

Answer: If this person is struggling financially then this is allowed. Otherwise, because the profit will likely be minimal, I do not think it is worthwhile to sell chametz gamur.

Question: I just moved apartments and want to remove the weeds so I feel comfortable here. Can I do this during the Shemita year?

Answer: If it is clear that the purpose of removing the weeds is for the sake of settling in and not for the sake of preparing the land for planting, this is allowed. It is better to trim the weeds as opposed to uprooting them.

Question: When making a misheberach for a sick person in shul, should you mention if they are a kohen or levi?

Answer: When making a misheberach in shul you should “hakohen” or “halevi.” Nevertheless, in your personal shemoneh esrei it is proper to say the name without any addition. The Rosh in Gittin explains the reason: when Jews were forced to change to non-Jewish names, they began the practice to call each other up in shul to the Torah as Kohen/Levi/Yisrael. This is how the practice began. Based on this, it only makes sense to continue this in the public forum, such as when making a misheberach. In a personal tefillah it seems that there is no reason to add the title.

Question: If a ben Eretz Yisrael is in chutz la'aretz for chag, can he lead tefillah or get an aliyah on day #2 of chag?

Answer: Rav Kook zt”l dealt with this question in his sefer Orech Mishpat, and poskened that the ben eretz yisrael should not lead. This is because he should be davening a weekday tefillah whereas everybody else is davening tefillah for chag. Rav Kook wrote that it is better for him not to go to shul altogether so that he will not be called

up to the Torah. However, it seems that if a person wants to go to shul he can, and if he is called up to the Torah he can take the aliyah. See Rav Moshe (OC 92) for more on the topic.

Question: Our shul’s minhag is for the Rav to give his derasha before chatzi-kaddish of musaf. Does this minhag have a halachic basis or should this be changed (as the Mishnah Berurah implies)?

Answer: The Mishnah Berurah did not love this practice because of the issue of hefsek before the kaddish. However, this can be solved by the chazan saying the last line of Ashrei, “Tehillat Hashem...,” again after the Rabbi’s derasha, immediately preceding kiddish.

The other option would be for the derasha to be given before Yekum Purkan. The problem that arises is that the Gemara in Sotah (39b) says that members of the shul should not leave until the Torah has been returned. Because there are people who often leave for the Rav’s derasha, this creates an issue with the Gemara (although maybe this is better and will encourage them to stay...)

In my shul, if I am speaking very briefly, I do so before Yekum Purkan. If I am speaking a bit longer, we return the Sefer Torah before Ashrei, and then I give the derasha followed by Ashrei and chatzi-kaddish.

However, as mentioned before, it is fine to say Ashrei, return the Torah, and have the derasha afterward before musaf, but it is best to say the last pasuk of Ashrei before kaddish.

● *Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.*

תקציר לפרשת מצורע

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ישראל איננה סובלת מצבים של חטא ולכן "מקיאה" מתוכה עמים שעוברים עבירות חמורות (בעיקר גילוי עריות). בדומה לכך, היא לא סובלת בתים שיש בהם צרות עין, הנובעת מתחושת "כחי ועוצם ידי" ומהתכחשות לכך שכל הרכוש מגיע לאדם מאת ה'. צרעת הבית היא אמנם נגע, המעיד על קלקול שצריך לתקנו, אך יש בה בשורה והבטחה משום שהיא מבטאת את ההשגחה המיוחדת של ה' הקיימת בארץ ישראל. מעלתה הגבוהה של הארץ תדרוש מהעם הקפדה יתירה על הרמה המוסרית. צרעת הבית היא האיתות הראשון לאדם שעליו לתקן את דרכיו עוד לפני שהקלקול הופך למהותי יותר, ולשמור על רמה רוחנית ומוסרית גבוהה, כראוי לארץ ישראל.

תהליך ההיטהרות מצרעת הבית דורש מהאדם להוציא את חפציו החוצה, ולחשוף לעין-כל את הדברים שיש לו ולא היה מוכן לחלוק עם אחרים. צרות עין איננה חטא, אלא מידה רעה, וצרעת הבית מצביעה על הצורך לתקן מידה זו. ה'כלי יקר' מוסיף עוד נדבך להבנת התיקון שנעשה בעזרת צרעת הבית: האדם היושב בבית-קבע בבטחה עלול לשכוח שה' הוא בעל הבית ושרכושו אינו אלא פיקדון בידו. אחיזתו ברכושו עלולה להיות חזקה עד כדי כך שלא יהיה מוכן לתת משלו לאחרים. צרעת הבית המגיעה מאת ה' אמורה להזכיר לאדם מי הוא בעל הבית האמיתי. ניתן לחבר בין הפירושים ולומר שמציאת המטמון החבוי בקירות הבית (כדברי רש"י) מגיעה בסופו של תהליך נפשי שהאדם עובר. לאחר שהאדם מבין כי רכושו אינו שלו אלא של ה', הוא ראוי לקבל מה' מתנות - אוצר המוטמן מתחת לביתו. אבן עזרא מבהיר שצרעת הבית קיימת רק בארץ ישראל בגלל קדושתה המיוחדת של הארץ. ארץ

צרעת הבית היא אחד מסוגי הנגעים המטמאים, שבעקבות הופעתם יש צורך בתהליך טהרה. על אף היותה אחד מהנגעים, מתייחדת צרעת הבית משאר הנגעים במיקום הכתיבה שלה בנפרד משאר הנגעים, ובפתיחתה באוירה חגיגית, המקשרת בין צרעת הבית לבין הכניסה לארץ ישראל: "כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְכֶם לְאֶחְזָה וְנִתְּתִי נֶגַע צְרַעַת בְּבֵית אֶרֶץ אֶחְזָתְכֶם" (ויקרא י"ד, לד). בעקבות זאת ניתן להבין שבצרעת הבית יש פן חיובי. רש"י, בעקבות המדרש (ויקרא רבה יז, ו) רואה את צרעת הבית כבשורה חיובית הקשורה לכניסה לארץ. צרעת הבית תעזור לעם ישראל לחשוף אוצרות שהחביאו הכנענים בקירות הבתים. פירוש זה, המצביע על הצד החיובי של נגעי בתים, איננו מתייחס לפן השלילי שבצרעת, שהיא נגע מטמא. מדרש אחר (ויקרא רבה יז, ב) מציע, שצרעת הבית באה על צרות עין - חוסר נכונות לתת לאחרים.

בסד

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Boundaries



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What is Freedom?

Pesach is called זמן חירותנו, the time of our freedom. What is freedom? Rabbi Eyal Vered says:

- Freedom is to take only what is needed, even at an elaborate wedding which serves enough food for an elephant herd.
- Freedom is the ability to refrain from hearing or reading lashon hara, even if everyone speaks it and it bubbles up on all the websites.
- Freedom is the ability to tell your boss and yourself that you have a wife and kids, and you will not be able to work endless hours, to leave when the kids are asleep and return when the kids are asleep.
- Freedom is knowing how to live with the money you have, and not with the money you don't have.
- Freedom is the ability to control your words and remain silent, not to respond to everything.
- Freedom is the ability to work hard to find the good even in places where no one else can see it, to look at the world positively without falling into the pit of complaint; to be grateful and to know how to fix.
- Freedom is to hold back from honking angrily at the driver who spends a second too long at the light.
- Freedom is the ability to see every person not as a means to an end - not as something to control or manipulate - but as an end in themselves, as another human being.

Our Mayflower

In 1947, David Ben-Gurion spoke before a UN commission of inquiry. In order to explain our connection to Israel, he spoke about Pesach:

“300 years ago, a ship called the Mayflower sailed to the New World. This was a great event in the history of England and America, but I wonder if there is a single Englishman who knows exactly when this ship set sail, and how many Americans know? Do we know how many people were on board and what was the state of the bread they ate when they left?

Thousands of years before the Mayflower set sail, the Jews left Egypt. Jews from around the world, even in America and Soviet Russia, know exactly when they left: the 15th of Nissan. And everyone knows exactly which bread the Jews ate: matzah. To this day, Jews around the world eat matzah on the 15th of Nissan and tell the stories of the Exodus and the difficulties the Jews have endured since being exiled. They conclude with two statements: “This year, we are slaves; next year, free men. This year, here; next year, in Yerushalayim, in Tzion, in Israel.”

Sharansky on Freedom

I once had the opportunity to interview Natan Sharansky. He recalled a unique and historical Seder Night as a Prisoner of Zion in a Russian jail. There was no matzah there, but he recounted how the entire night he spoke to the other inmates about leaving bondage and becoming free. But then he asked the following question: “Imagine a man sitting in prison in Siberia and a man leisurely walking the streets of Israel. Who is free and who is a slave?” Surprisingly, Sharansky answered that it is easier to remain a free person in prison.

In such a situation, it's clear who is good and who is evil, and it's easy to cling to good. But in an open society like our own, a person is faced with a surge of challenges and distractions and it is very difficult to make unbiased choices. The boundaries between good and evil are blurred. It is easier to indulge in temptation. And above all, a person feels he is free, and he isn't even aware of his 'slavery.'

“It is actually within the kind of society we have the opportunity of living in today that one feels he needs to work hard to achieve real freedom,” said Sharansky.

Putting Things Straight

Rabbi Chaim Navon says that Seder Night teaches us that we are not what we thought. “The age of rating has misled us into thinking that we are addicted media consumers, that we are new and cool, that we are restless innovators, that our children are bored little tyrants,” he says.

“But suddenly, at the Seder, between the jokes about matzah and charoset and the complaints about family stuffiness, we reveal who we truly are: the children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, who long most to bring our children into the secret of this eternal covenant into which our own parents brought us. We secretly shed a tear when we remember our late grandparents, and another one when we dream of our future grandchildren.”

There's a lot of chaos on this night, says Rav Navon, but first and foremost, “it's the Seder – it puts things in order.”

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis
Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi
Rabbi at Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd the Kohen shall command; and two live clean birds, cedar wood, crimson thread and hyssop shall be taken for the one being purified” (Vayikra 14:4).

Having been diagnosed with Tzara'at, sent outside the camp and fully recovered from his affliction, the Metzora would undergo a purification procedure involving, "two live clean birds, cedar wood, crimson thread and hyssop". Rashi explains the significance of each of these ingredients:

"Because the afflictions come as a result of Lashon HaRa which is an act of babbling words, therefore birds which constantly babble with a chirping voice are required to purify him. 'And cedar wood' - Because the afflictions come as a result of arrogance. (The cedar tree represents haughtiness because of its towering height and strength. Arrogance leads one to look

down on others and speak badly of them). 'And crimson thread and hyssop' - What is his remedy that he should be healed? He should lower himself from his pride like a worm (from which the crimson thread is made) and hyssop (which is a lowly and weak plant, representing humility)" (Rashi, Vayikra 14:4).

Rashi therefore explains that each of these items either represents the cause of his affliction (arrogance, Lashon Hara) or the required antidote (humility). Whilst we can now understand that the birds represent babbling and Lashon Hara, why were two birds needed? The Sefat Emet (Parshat Metzora, 5661) explains the significance of the two birds, based on a surprising statement of the Zohar:

"Just as humans are punished for "Mila Bisha" (Lashon Hara in Aramaic), so they are punished for "Mila Tava" (Lashon Hatov)" (Zohar, Tosefet Volume 3, 301b).

Why is Lashon Hatov - speaking well of somebody - deserving of punishment? One possible answer is that the Zohar is referring to the law (Rambam, Hilchot De'ot 7:4) that one should not speak positively about somebody if it will lead to others responding with Lashon Hara.

The Sefat Emet answers differently, that the Zohar is referring to Lashon Hatov that one could have said, but did not. One bird is brought to deal with the Lashon Hara a person spoke. The other is brought for the missed opportunities to take advantage of the gift of speech.

A harmful word can destroy. The absence of a good word can also destroy. The solution to speaking Lashon Hara is not to stop speaking, but to uplift the way we speak. In addition to avoiding evil speech, we must learn to speak well of others.

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The Power of Shame



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

On 20 December 2013, a young woman named Justine Sacco was waiting in Heathrow airport before boarding a flight to Africa. To while away the time, she sent a tweet in questionable taste about the hazards of catching AIDS. There was no immediate response, and she boarded the plane unaware of the storm that was about to break. Eleven hours later, upon landing, she discovered that she had become an international cause célèbre. Her tweet, and responses to it, had gone viral. Over the next 11 days she would be googled more than a million times. She was branded a racist and dismissed from her job. Overnight she had become a pariah.¹

The new social media have brought about a return to an ancient phenomenon, public shaming. Two recent books - Jon Ronson's *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* and Jennifer Jacquet's *Is Shame Necessary?*² - have discussed it. Jacquet believes it is a good thing. It can be a way of getting public corporations to behave more responsibly, for example. Ronson highlights the dangers. It is one thing to be shamed by the community of which you are a part, quite another by a global network of strangers who know nothing about you or the context in which your act took place. That is more like a lynch mob than the pursuit of justice.

Either way, this gives us a way of understanding the otherwise bewildering phenomenon of *tsara'at*, the condition dealt with at length in last week's parsha and this one. *Tsara'at* has been variously translated as leprosy, skin disease, and scaly infection. Yet there are formidable problems in identifying it with any known disease. First, its symptoms do not correspond to Hansen's Disease,

otherwise known as leprosy. Second, the *tsara'at* described in the Torah affects not only human beings but also the walls of houses, furniture, and clothes. There is no known medical condition that has this property.

Besides, the Torah is a book about holiness and correct conduct. It is not a medical text. Even if it were, as David Zvi Hoffman points out in his commentary,³ the procedures to be carried out do not correspond to those that would be done if *tsara'at* were a contagious disease. Finally, *tsara'at* as described in the Torah is a condition that brings not sickness but rather impurity, *tumah*. Health and purity are different things altogether.

The Sages decoded the mystery by relating our parsha to the instances in the Torah in which someone was actually afflicted by *tsara'at*. It happened to Miriam when she spoke against her brother Moses (Num. 12:1-15). Another example referred to was Moses who, at the Burning Bush, said to G-d that the Israelites would not believe in him. His hand briefly turned "as leprosy as snow" (Ex. 4:7). The Sages regarded *tsara'at* as a punishment for *lashon hara*, evil speech, speaking negatively about or denigrating another person.

This helped them explain why the symptoms of *tsara'at* - mould, discolouration - could affect walls, furniture, clothes, and human skin. These were a sequence of warnings or punishments. First G-d warned the offender by sending a sign of decay to the walls of his house. If the offender repented the condition stopped there. If he failed to do so his furniture was affected, then his clothes, and finally his skin.

How are we to understand this? Why was "evil speech" regarded as so serious

an offence that it took these strange phenomena to point to its existence? And why was it punished this way and not another?

It was the anthropologist Ruth Benedict and her book about Japanese culture, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*,⁴ that popularised a distinction between two kinds of society: *guilt cultures* and *shame cultures*. Ancient Greece, like Japan, was a shame culture. Judaism and the religions influenced by it (most obviously, Calvinism) were guilt cultures. The differences between them are substantial.

In shame cultures, what matters is the judgment of others. Acting morally means conforming to public roles, rules, and expectations. You do what other people expect you to do. You follow society's conventions. If you fail to do so, society punishes you by subjecting you to shame, ridicule, disapproval, humiliation, and ostracism. In guilt cultures what matters is not what other people think but what the voice of conscience tells you. Living morally means acting in accordance with internalised moral imperatives: "You shall" and "You shall not." What matters is what you know to be right and wrong.

People in shame cultures are *other-directed*. They care about how they appear in the eyes of others, or as we would say today, they care about their "image." People in guilt cultures are *inner-directed*. They care about what they know about themselves in moments of absolute honesty. Even if your public image is undamaged, if you know you have done wrong it will make you feel uneasy. You will wake up at night, troubled. "O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!" says Shakespeare's Richard III. "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues / And every tongue brings in a several tale / And every

tale condemns me for a villain.” Shame is public humiliation. Guilt is inner torment.

The emergence of a guilt culture in Judaism flowed from its understanding of the relationship between G-d and humankind. In Judaism we are not actors on a stage with society as the audience and the judge. We can fool society; we cannot fool G-d. All pretence and pride, every mask and persona, the cosmetic cultivation of public image are irrelevant: “The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). Shame cultures are collective and conformist. By contrast Judaism, the archetypal guilt culture, emphasises the individual and their relationship with G-d. What matters is not whether we conform to the culture of the age but whether we do what is good, just, and right.

This makes the law of *tsara'at* fascinating, because according to the Sages' interpretation, it constitutes one of the rare instances in the Torah of *punishment by shame rather than guilt*. The appearance of mould or discolouration on the walls of a house was a public signal of private wrongdoing. It was a way of saying to everyone who lived or visited there, “Bad things have been said in this place.” Little by little the signals came ever closer to the culprit, appearing next on their bed or chair, then on their clothes, then on their skin, until eventually their found themselves diagnosed as defiled:

And a blighted person, one bearing the disease - their clothing shall be torn, and the hair of their head disarrayed. And they shall cover their upper lips as they cry out, ‘Impure! Impure!’ They shall be in a state of impurity for as long as they have the disease; they are impure. They shall live apart; outside the camp shall be their dwelling. (Lev. 13:45-46)

These are quintessential expressions of shame. First is the *stigma*: the public marks of disgrace or dishonour (the torn clothes, unkempt hair). Then comes the

ostracism: temporary exclusion from the normal affairs of society. These have nothing to do with illness and everything to do with social disapproval. This is what makes the law of *tsara'at* so hard to understand at first: it is one of the rare appearances of public shaming in a non-shame, guilt-based culture.⁵ It happened, though, not because society had expressed its disapproval but because G-d was signalling that it should do so.

Why specifically in the case of *lashon hara*, “evil speech”? Because *speech is what holds society together*. Anthropologists have argued that language evolved among humans precisely in order to strengthen the bonds between them so that they could co-operate in larger groupings than any other animal. What sustains co-operation is *trust*. This allows and encourages me to make sacrifices for the group, knowing that others can be relied on to do likewise. This is precisely why *lashon hara* is so destructive. It undermines trust. It makes people suspicious about one another. It weakens the bonds that hold the group together. If unchecked, *lashon hara* will destroy any group it attacks: a family, a team, a community, even a nation. Hence its uniquely malicious character: It uses the power of language to weaken the very thing language was brought into being to create, namely, the trust that sustains the social bond.

That is why the punishment for *lashon hara* was to be temporarily excluded from society by *public exposure* (the signs that appear on walls, furniture, clothes, and skin), *stigmatisation* and *shame* (the torn clothes, etc.) and *ostracism* (being forced to live outside the camp). It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to punish the malicious gossip using the normal conventions of law, courts, and the establishment of guilt. This can be done in the case of *motsi shem ra*, libel or slander, because these are all cases of *making a false statement*. *Lashon hara* is more subtle. It is done not by falsehood but by insinuation. There are many ways of harming a person's reputation without

actually telling a lie. Someone accused of *lashon hara* can easily say, “I didn't say it, I didn't mean it, and even if I did, I did not say anything that was untrue.” The best way of dealing with people who poison relationships without actually uttering falsehoods is by naming, shaming, and shunning them.

That, according to the Sages, is what *tsara'at* miraculously did in ancient times. It no longer exists in the form described in the Torah. But the use of the Internet and social media as instruments of public shaming illustrates both the power and the danger of a culture of shame. Only rarely does the Torah invoke it, and in the case of the *metzora* only by an act of G-d, not society. Yet the moral of the *metzora* remains. Malicious gossip, *lashon hara*, undermines relationships, erodes the social bond, and damages trust. It deserves to be exposed and shamed.

Never speak ill of others, and stay far from those who do.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is the message of *tsara'at* so relevant in our world today?
- Why are words important to G-d? Why are words important to humankind?
- Have you ever noticed hateful speech on social media? How do you think it feels to have this attention directed at you?

1. Jon Ronson, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, London: Picador, 2015, pp. 63-86.
2. Jennifer Jacquet, *Is Shame Necessary? New Uses for an Old Tool*, London: Allen Lane, 2015.
3. Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman, *Commentary to Sefer Vayikra* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1972), vol. 1, pp. 253-255.
4. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946.
5. Another example of shame, according to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was the ceremony in which a slave who did not wish to go free after the completion of six years of service, had his ear pierced against a doorpost (Ex. 20:6). See Rashi ad loc., and Kiddushin 22b.

The Essence of Torah



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (71a) quotes three different Beraisos in which three Tanna'im teach that there are certain mitzvos that have never happened and never will happen.

These are the ben sorer umoreh (the rebellious son), the ir hanidachas (the idolatrous city), and the bayis hamenuga (the leprous house) discussed in our parsha. As the Gemara explains, there are so many specific conditions that must be met in order for these mitzvos to apply that it is virtually impossible for them to become a practical reality. The Gemara explains that the reason that these mitzvos are included in the Torah is so that "we can expound them and receive a reward."

The Ba'al HaTanya discusses the phenomenon of the Torah's inclusion of dinim that may not occur in practice, and Rav Soloveitchik expanded on his words in order to explain this Gemara (Ish HaHalachah 1:6). The Torah indeed includes many positive and negative mitzvos. However, those mitzvos are not really the essence of the Torah; they are ancillary in nature. The essence of the Torah is to give a presentation of what Elokus (G-dliness) is, a description of the Creator.

For this reason, the Rav described how he felt as if Hashem revealed Himself to him when he discovered something new in Torah, as if he perceived a glimpse of Elokus at that time. When he understood a new insight in Torah, he came into the presence of Hashem. This, the Rav felt, should lead the student of Torah to melt into insignificance, to be overcome by a profound sense of humility, never arrogance.

The Ramban cites from the Zohar that the Torah is referred to as "the names of Hashem," containing within it the personality and characteristics of Hashem Himself (see Nefesh HaChayim 4:19). The difficulty is that the essence of Hashem is too esoteric and abstract for us to comprehend, "For no human can see Me and live" (Shemos 33:20).

As Rav Yosef Albo wrote, "If I would know [what Elokus is], I would be [Him]."

Hashem simplified Elokus by explaining it to us through the practical mitzvos of the Torah. In a similar way, one might present the abstract concepts of atomic energy to children using different colored balls to represent the interaction of protons, neutrons, and electrons. Those models do not accurately depict the actual workings of atomic particles, but serve as a mashal for the uninformed to facilitate a basic understanding of these concepts.

The Torah is similarly a mashal. The passuk in Shmuel I (24:14) says "As the 'Proverb of the Ancient One' says, 'Wickedness emanates from the wicked.'" Rashi (Shemos 21:13) explains that the phrase משל הקדמוני is a reference to the Torah itself, which is the "proverb" of Hashem, the "Ancient One." Thus, the meaning of the passuk in Shmuel is that the Torah taught us the lesson that "wickedness emanates from the wicked" when it stated, "And G-d brought it [the unintentional manslaughter] to his hand" (Shemos 21:13).

The Chofetz Chaim (Shem Olam 1:12) explains that this not only means that the Torah is the Divine mashal authored by Hashem, but that it is actually a mashal of Hashem. The Chofetz Chaim likens the Torah to a photograph of the king. Even if one has never actually seen the king himself, he is able to recognize the king when he meets him based on the photograph. In the Torah, Hashem gave us a "mashal of a mashal" of a representation and image of what Elokus is about, so that we may at least begin to understand Elokus itself.

The passuk in Iyov states "Then He looked and recorded it; He prepared it and perfected it" (28:27). The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 40:1) explains that Hashem "prepared" the Torah numerous times before He actually gave it to Bnei Yisrael. This passuk refers to the idea that Hashem could not present actual Elokus in the Torah; instead, He provided an illustration of

Elokus, on simpler and simpler levels, which could be grasped by human intellect. In the words of the Tanya, "The Torah has journeyed in a descent through hidden stages, stage after stage...until it clothed itself in material matters."

Elokus has been concealed within the Torah. The overwhelming majority of the dinim of the Torah were given on a level that Man can understand and experience practically. In this way, Man is able to have a connection with Elokus. Of course, we must be careful to fulfill in practice all the mitzvos of the Torah and be careful not to violate any of its issurim, but the ultimate purpose of all of the mitzvos is to serve as a description of Elokus.

Apparently, there were certain aspects of Elokus, corresponding to the three mitzvos mentioned above, that could not be simplified to the level of practical reality; they had to remain in their initial state. That is why these three mitzvos never happened and never will happen. Still, they had to be included in the body of the Torah because all the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos are necessary for the full description of the image of Hashem.

It is obvious that if the purpose of the Torah were merely to present all the rules in Hashem's lawbook, there would be no reason to include in it dinim that have absolutely no practical relevance. The fact that there exists even one mitzvah that never happened and never will happen sheds light on the balance of the entire corpus of mitzvos of the Torah. This is what the Gemara is teaching us in its answer, דרוש וקבל שר. We must learn the lesson of these three dinim and extend that lesson to the rest of the Torah – that the essence of Torah is to teach us the personality and characteristics of Hashem Himself.

● From 'Rav Schachter on the Parsha'.

A Specific Mission



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

As we continue this week with the Parshiyot about צרעת, and all of the rules that apply to it, Parshat Metzora specifically begins with the purification process of someone with צרעת. A major component in this process is when the מצורע goes to the Mikvah, and the Sefer HaChinuch famously writes that the concept of going to the Mikvah as part of the purification process for a מצורע is a spiritual idea, part of a renewal and rebirth for the מצורע. The Gemara in Masechet Ta'anit brings a well-known line, comparing the act of being Tovel in the Mikvah and the process of Teshuva. The Gemara says that if someone confesses, does וידוי, for a sin that he did but does not actually plan on changing his ways, it is like someone who goes to the mikvah with an impure object in his hand. As the Gemara calls it, he is "טובל וישרץ בידו", attempting to purify himself but lacking any intention about forsaking his impure ways. The question that needs to be addressed is how to properly understand the nature of this comparison, and what can it teach us about the process of Teshuva.

The discussion really begins with a question proposed by Rav Chaim Soloveitchik. When the Gemara says that someone who goes to the Mikvah while still holding an impure שרץ doesn't work, what exactly does that mean? Does the Gemara mean to say that the entire act of being Tovel in the Mikvah was ineffective, and therefore any impurity that the person had beforehand still remains? Alternatively, perhaps the Gemara means that in fact that act of being Tovel did work, and it would purify him from any

previous impurity, and simply because he is still holding an impure שרץ, he receives a new level of impurity. In essence, was there any significance to the Mikvah process in removing previous impurity?

In a fascinating way, this exact same question is discussed with regards to the other half of the comparison from the Gemara, about someone who confesses his sins but does not intend to change his ways. The משנת רב אהרון חכמה ומוסר asks whether this person would at least be forgiven for his past sins even though he is still lacking in his full Teshuva process. When the Gemara compares this person to someone who is Tovel with an impure שרץ in his hand, is that to say that the act of וידוי for this person is completely meaningless, since it does not come with any acceptance for the future? Or perhaps the Gemara means that the act of confessing one's sins is still in fact meaningful on its own, but nevertheless since he lacks intention on changing his ways, ultimately he has not fulfilled the Teshuva process.

After seeing these two parallel questions, we can now get to the answer given by Rav Chaim, and understand the lesson that it teaches us with regards to Teshuva. Rav Chaim concludes that how we view the act of being טובל וישרץ בידו depends on the situation. If the person is only impure in the first place with טמאת שרץ, then when he now tries to purify himself while still holding an impure שרץ, it is totally insignificant. Not only does he obviously remain impure, since he is still holding an impure שרץ, but in fact that entire

process had no value altogether. However, if someone has a higher level of impurity, and then tried to purify himself while still holding an impure שרץ, then the situation would be different. Although he still remains impure, as he is nonetheless still holding an impure שרץ, in this case the act of purification actually would have significance. No longer would the act of purification be meaningless; the person would in fact be purified from his original impurity, despite the fact that he is still impure from טומאת שרץ.

Relating back to the comparison of the Gemara, this answer of Rav Chaim has an important lesson for the process of Teshuva. If when one confesses his sins, he intends to remain on that exact same level of sin, then he would be comparable to one who is going to be Tovel with an impure שרץ for that exact same level of impurity. However, if one at least intends to go from a higher level of sin to a lower level of sin, then he would instead become like one who wants to purify himself from a higher level of impurity, and the act of purification itself would now become significant. The intention for improvement, even subtle, would now give significance to the entire act of repentance, and although he still has not yet completed the process, he nonetheless has done a very meaningful step in the process of Teshuva.

● Edited by Jay Eisenstadt and Ari Levine.

A Particular Order



Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein
Chief Rabbi of South Africa

In Shemini, the Torah details the laws of purity and impurity with regard to animals. Tazria and Metzora deal with the laws of purity and impurity with regard to people. It would seem that the appropriate order should have been to deal with the laws of human beings first and then the laws of animals, as human beings are more important; why, then, does the Torah deal with the laws of animals before the laws of human beings?

Rashi quotes from the Midrash which says that G-d modeled this structure on the order in which He created the world. In the same way that when He created the world He created animals before human beings, so too in the Torah He dealt with the laws of the animals before the laws of human beings.

It is true that G-d created the world in this particular order, but why is it necessary to apply this order to the laws of the Torah? What does one thing have to do with the other? Just because G-d created the world in that order, does that mean that the laws of the Torah have to be structured in the same way?

The Torah and the world are intertwined. They are both creations of G-d and in a sense, they are actually the same creation. Rav Yerucham Levovitz, one of the heads of the Mir Yeshiva prior to World War II, explains that the Torah's order parallels the order of creation because Torah is the blueprint of the world – as our Sages tell us, G-d looked into the Torah and created the world. This is what the Mishnah refers to when it says “turn it [the Torah] over and over, for everything is in it.” Everything that we see in this world has its roots in Torah because the Torah was the overarching design for the world. Thus, the order of the Torah and

the world are parallel, because the world was created from the Torah.

The Maharal of Prague has another approach to this. He says that the Torah is actually the continuation of creation, which was not complete after the six days. The physical part had been completed but the moral and spiritual part of the world had not been brought to fruition yet because the Torah had not yet been given. Without the Torah, the world was incomplete. We only reach completion when we live in accordance with G-d's will as He has set out for us in the Torah. The reason why the structure of the laws in the Torah parallels the structure of the creation of the world is that one is the physical creation of the world, and the other is the spiritual creation of the world. Torah brings the physical world to perfection. All of the commandments of the Torah – how to treat our fellow human beings, giving charity, keeping Shabbos, and everything that comprises Judaism – are there to complete the world. The commandments of the Torah refine us, taking us from a state of incompleteness to a state of completion. Therefore, the Torah is parallel to the world in its structure; it is the continuation of creation.

In this vein the Maharal explains the passage in the Talmud that says that the world was actually in abeyance. Bereishit calls the sixth day of creation yom hashishi “the sixth day.” All of the other days of creation do not have a definite article. For example, it does not say yom hasheni, “the second day,” but yom sheni, “day two,” meaning day two of creation. Why is this so? Because, says the Gemara, it is referring to a different, specific “sixth day,” the sixth day of Sivan which was the date the Torah was given. At the outset G-d said if the children of Israel will accept

the Torah at Mount Sinai, good; if not, the world will return to *tohu vavohu*, chaos and void, as it was before Creation. Thus, the whole of Creation was waiting for the sixth day of Sivan.

The Maharal explains this Gemara to mean not that G-d had completed the world and would reverse the whole Creation if the Jews did not accept the Torah, but rather that the world was not finished being created. The six days of Creation were waiting for their completion and until the Torah came into the world there was just chaos and void. The Torah brought that chaos into order and structure by giving the framework for how to live our lives and in effect completed the process of creation. Thus, the structuring of Creation is exactly the same structure as the laws of the Torah. Torah is part of the process of creation.

Essentially, Torah is not just something “extra,” just a nice thing to have. It is the very framework and foundation that gives structure and order to everything in the world. We should not view our lives and the world as merely physical things. We must understand that this physical world is a shell and that what really matters is what is inside, the soul of the human being and the spiritual and moral code that G-d has given us in His Torah. That is what brings everything to fruition and completion.

Living a life of Torah is about creativity, about the process of bringing ourselves, our lives, those closest to us, our families, and our communities to that creative process, to complete the process of creation that was begun by G-d in the six days of Creation.

Calling Out Impurity



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

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

והצרוע אשר בו הנגע בגדיו יהיו פרמים וראשו יהיה פרוע ועל שפם יעטה וטמא טמא יקרא. (ויקרא יג:מה)
And the leper upon whom the *nega* is [located] – his clothes shall be ripped, and his head disheveled, and he shall cloak his upper lip and shall cry out: “**tamei, tamei.**” (Vayikra 13:45)

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

The Shelah HaKadosh offers a different interpretation based on a *gemara* (Kiddushin 72b) that states that one who condemns another condemns with his own faults. A *tzaru'a* is one who bad mouths others, who calls others impure. One who recognizes specific faults with others, who always highlights others' shortcomings, is likely subject to the same shortcomings. He publicly denounces it on others to deflect it from himself. The *pasuk* can thus be read as meaning that the impure one will call others impure.

The Baal Shem Tov says something similar in a comment on a mishna in Nega'im (2:5): כל הנגעים אדם רואה חוץ מנגעי עצמו:

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



Every fault that one finds with another is actually one's own fault.

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

To clarify the point, the Baal Shem Tov told the story of a town milkman who was suddenly summoned to court. He was a very honest man and was surprised that someone had filed a complaint against his integrity. The plaintiff was the baker in town. The baker was accustomed to acquiring all his dairy products from this milkman. The baker suspected that the milkman was cheating him, so he weighed the butter. Lo and behold, what

was labeled as a pound of butter was in fact slightly less. On the day of the trial, the milkman arrived in court for the first time in his life. The judge recited the alleged crime of fraud by selling incorrect measurements of goods. The judge then asked the milkman whether he checks the weight of the goods he sells with a professional scale. The milkman replied that he does not own a professional scale. The judge responded in disbelief: “How can you just estimate the weight of products! You just decide on your own? That's cheating!”

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

The judge then turned to the baker, now red in the face and said: “One who condemns another condemns with his own faults.”

An important lesson that we learn from the *metzora* is that before we begin to explore and disclose (“call out”) the faults of others, let us look deep inside ourselves and see how we can improve.

The Power of the Spoken Word



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In Metzora, we once again read of the affliction of *tzara'as*, which perhaps is aptly defined as a *spiritual malady with a physical manifestation*. According to his sin, and the degree of sin, a person may notice an eruption of *tzara'as* on his clothing, the walls of his home, or his body, with varying degrees of color and severity. According to the diagnosis of the kohen, the individual may be declared impure with *negah tzara'as*.

His punishment? בְּדָד יֵשֵׁב מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבֵוֹ - He is to sit alone, in solitude, outside of all three camps, pondering his sin, and calling out to all passerby, טָמֵא יִקְרָא, טָמֵא | "impure, impure!" so that others shall stay away from him, his impurity and his sin (see Vayikra 13:45-46 w/ Rashi).

What are the underlying causes of *tzara'as*? R' Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of R' Yochanan: על שבעה דברים נגעים באין - *Tzara'as* afflictions come upon a person for any one of seven sinful things: על לשון הרע ועל שפיכות דמים ועל שבועת שוא ועל גילוי עריות ועל גסות הרוח ועל הגזל ועל צרות העין - for the sins of: (1) *lashon harah* (2) *murder* (3) *vain oaths* (4) *illicit relations* (5) *haughtiness* (6) *theft* and (7) *stinginess* (Arachin 16a).

Rashi (to Vayikra 14:4) quotes both the sins of *lashon harah* and *ga'sus ha'ruach/gay'vah* (haughtiness) as the causes for the *tzara'as* malady.

It is fitting, therefore, that since the *Metzora* - the one who was *motzi shem rah* (spoke badly about others) - caused a divide between people with his poisonous attitude, and venomous words, he is to be separated from society, to dwell alone (Rashi to 13:46), all the days that the affliction plagues him. As we read this *parsha* once again, it is an opportune time to remind ourselves of the power, blessing, and danger of the spoken word.

R' Yaakov Edelstein zt'l (1924-2017 - chief rabbi of Ramat HaSharon, Israel) teaches,

"There is a terrible illness - tongue disease. A person gets used to talking, and he can't feel the words coming out of his mouth. Speech is automatic. In *Chovos Ha'Levavos* (Duties of the Heart), it is written that a person has to get into the habit of thinking that the hardest thing for him to move is his tongue.

"Before a person walks anywhere, he thinks about where he is going. He needs to make a decision. His hands and feet don't move automatically without his thinking about it. When a person picks up a hammer to pound in a nail, he thinks about what exactly he needs to do. But speech emerges from a person's mouth. He needs to make it a habit of thinking that moving the tongue is harder than moving a hand or leg. This way he will think before he speaks, before he says a word" (Reaching for Heaven, Artscroll, p.145-146).

How powerful is the spoken word, which can create worlds; and how dangerous is the very same tool, which can destroy worlds. As the holy Chafetz Chaim zt'l wrote in his *hakdamah* (introduction) to his *Sefer Kuntras Chovas Ha'Shemirah*: כלל הדברים בדבורו - של אדם יכול לברוא עולמות ולהחריבן - *the sum of the matter is, that with words, man can create worlds, and with words, man can destroy worlds*. The Sages teach (Taanis 9a) that the Clouds of Glory that protected the Israelites in the desert for forty years were in the merit of Aharon *Ha'Kohen*, the man of peace. R' Yitzchok Zilberstein offers a fascinating *chiddush* as to why Aharon, the lover and pursuer of peace, merited to create these special Clouds.

R' Zilberstein writes, "A person has the power to sow discord, but he also has great power to create a protective shield through love and unity towards his fellow Jews.

"During the forty years that the Jewish people were in the Wilderness, they were protected by the Clouds of Glory, which came in the merit of Aharon. We generally

think of these clouds as a miraculous spiritual entity that existed only during the time that the Jews were in the desert. But the truth is that we can recreate these protective clouds even today. How?

"The Sifsei Tzaddik (d.1920, Poland) teaches, "The laws of science confirm that the vapor that leaves the mouth of two people who love each other join together in the air. Aharon ha'Kohen loved peace and pursued peace, and because of him, all of the Jewish people loved one another. In Aharon's merit, the vapor that emerged from the mouths of the 600,000 Jews combined to create the Clouds of Glory.'

"We see from here that when two friends speak to each other with love and camaraderie, the invisible spiritual 'vapors' that leave their mouths combine to form 'Clouds of Glory' that have the power to protect the Jewish people from harm.

"What a profound insight that ought to inspire each of us to strengthen our friendships (with one another)" (Aleinu L'Shabei'ach, Vayikra, p.182-183).

Let us learn from the sins of the *metzora* has we ought not to behave, and let us learn from Aharon, our great leader, how we must behave. As we read in *Pirkei Avos* הָלַל אֹמֵר, הָרִי מִתְלַמְּדֵי שְׁל אֶהְרֵוּ, אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם, אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמְקַרְבָן לַתּוֹרָה -

Hillel used to say: Be of the students of Aharon, love peace, pursue peace, love people and bring them close to Torah (Avos 1:12).

Perhaps, if we can think before we speak (*halavay!*), thereby creating worlds, we too will merit to create (proverbial) Clouds of Glory, where all of Israel can reside within, together as one - כאיש אחד בלב אחד - basking in Divine Protection and blessing.

Dayenu



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How could an observant Jew say, let alone sing, that 'it would have been enough'- even had G-d not given us the Torah?

And how could a Zionist say, let alone sing, that 'it would have been enough'- even if G-d had not given us the Land of Israel?

Nevertheless, every year at the Seder, we all sing the popular song of *dayenu*, which seems to convey precisely that message!

To uncover its true meaning, we must consider when exactly *dayneu* is recited at the Seder.

The primary purpose of the Magid section of the Seder, is to tell the story of the Exodus; but following the guidelines of the Mishna in Tractate Pesachim, we are also instructed to conclude that story with praise, and hence Magid concludes as we recite the first two chapters of Hallel (Psalms 113-114).

Note in your Haggadah, that we recite *dayenu* immediately after we tell the story of the Exodus, but **before** we sing the Hallel and hence – this song can be understood as an introduction to the Hallel.

As such, one could suggest that the refrain of *dayenu* carries an implicit suffix – and should be translated: 'it would have been enough – TO PRAISE G-D', i.e. even if G-d had only taken us out of Egypt and not given us the Torah **'it would have been enough to say thank you and praise Him.'**

In this manner, the *dayenu* poetically summarizes each significant stage of redemption, from the time of the Exodus

until Am Yisrael's conquest of the Land – stating that each single act of G-d's kindness in that process obligates us to praise Him: e.g.

– Had He split the sea, but not given us the *manna*, that alone would have been reason enough to say Hallel...

– Had He only given us the *manna* but not brought us close to Mt. Sinai - it would have been reason enough to say Hallel

... And so on.



Each significant stage in the process of redemption deserves our recognition- and requires that we praise G-d for it, even though redemption may be far from complete.

If this interpretation is correct, then the next paragraph of "*al achat kama vekhama*," makes perfect sense: How much more so – is it proper to thank G-d for He has performed these fifteen acts of kindness – each act alone worthy of praise. Even more so we must praise G-d, for He had performed **all** of them!

From this perspective, *dayenu* could be understood as serving a double purpose. Not only does it introduce the Hallel that we are about to sing, it also serves as a continuation of the story of the Exodus. Let's explain why:

Our primary obligation is the tell the story of the Exodus, but where does that story end? At the simplest level, it concludes when we leave Egypt to serve our G-d.

And indeed, that is the last discussion in Magid before *dayenu*. But in an indirect manner - *dayenu* actually continues that story, picking up from the Ten Plagues and continuing through all the significant events in the desert until our arrival in the Land of Israel.

From this perspective, this poem may allude to a very profound message in regard to the process of *geula* – redemption. There are those who focus at the Seder only on the first stanza of *dayenu*. For them, the goal of redemption is the universal value of freedom. Others focus only upon the last stanzas, and hence – without the entire land of Israel in our possession, and without the re-building of the Temple, redemption itself remains meaningless.

The beautiful poem of *dayenu* seems to disagree with both approaches. Instead, each significant stage in the process of redemption deserves our recognition- and requires that we praise G-d for it, even though redemption may be far from complete.

The redemption of Israel in our own time, can be viewed in a similar manner. Every significant step in this process, be it simply sovereignty, or partial borders, or victory in battle, or freedom to study Torah, requires our recognition and gratitude. Each stage, albeit incomplete, requires our gratitude – but as we say Hallel - we must remind ourselves that it is incumbent upon us to act in a manner to be deserving of that next stage.

Dayenu challenges us to become partners with G-d in the process of our redemption.

Celebrating Our Status as Hashem's Children



Rabbi Eli Mansour

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The Shabbat before Pesach is given the special name "Shabbat Ha'gadol" - "The Great Shabbat."

Various explanations have been given for this name, the most famous of which is that suggested by the Tur. It was on the Shabbat before the Exodus, the Tur writes, that Beneh Yisrael were required to take a sheep and prepare it for the Pesach sacrifice which they would offer four days later, on the afternoon before the plague of the firstborn. The Egyptians, who worshipped cattle, saw Beneh Yisrael walking about with sheep and asked what they were doing. Beneh Yisrael fearlessly explained that they were preparing the sheep to be slaughtered as a sacrifice to Hashem. Despite this affront to their pagan beliefs, the Egyptians were unable to cause any harm to Beneh Yisrael. This great miracle, which occurred on the Shabbat before the first Pesach, is celebrated on Shabbat Ha'gadol, which is so named because of the great miracle which transpired on this day.

The question, however, remains as to why this miracle is celebrated on the Shabbat before Pesach, and not on the calendar date on which it occurred - the 10th of Nissan. Why was specifically Shabbat chosen as the time for celebrating this great miracle?

Rav Pinchas Friedman (contemporary) explains the particular relevance of Shabbat to the miracle that happened on the 10th of Nissan before the Exodus. The Gemara teaches that it is forbidden for a



On that Shabbat when they prepared a sheep for the sacrifice, they proclaimed publicly and loudly that they worshipped only the one, true G-d. And so at that moment, they truly became G-d's children.

non-Jew to celebrate Shabbat; meaning, not only are gentiles not obligated to observe Shabbat - they are prohibited from doing so. The Hid"ra (Rav Haim Yosef David Azulai, 1724-1806), in his work Rosh David, explains this prohibition based on the fact that Shabbat is similar to "Sharbito Shel Melech" - a king's scepter. Using a king's scepter is a capital offense, as it constitutes a grave infraction on the king's honor. However, a king would certainly allow his beloved child use his scepter. The Jewish People are G-d's beloved children, as Moshe Rabbenu tells us in the Book of Debarim: "You are children of Hashem your G-d." Therefore, we are allowed to observe Shabbat - G-d's "scepter" - while other nations may not.

Rav Friedman proceeds to cite the comment of the work Noam Megadim explaining that Beneh Yisrael earn this stature of G-d's children when we reject all other deities besides the one, true G-d. Whereas other nations believe in G-d as well as other deities, we profess our belief in only G-d Himself. Rav Friedman thus explained that it was specifically

on Shabbat that Beneh Yisrael needed to prepare their sheep for the Pesach offering - because in so doing, they proclaimed their firm rejection of the Egyptians' pagan beliefs. Our Sages teach us that during the period of exile in Egypt, Beneh Yisrael - while still believing in G-d - practiced the idol-worship of the Egyptians. Over the course of their stay in Egypt, living with constant exposure to the Egyptians' belief system, they gradually adopted the Egyptians' beliefs and practices. However, on the 10th of Nissan, on the Shabbat before the Exodus, Beneh Yisrael resoundingly rejected the Egyptians' idol-worship. On that Shabbat when they prepared a sheep for the sacrifice, they proclaimed publicly and loudly that they worshipped only the one, true G-d. And so at that moment, they truly became G-d's children - and therefore this took place specifically on Shabbat, the day which underscores our nation's unique status as Hashem's beloved children.

This is the reason why we celebrate this miracle specifically on Shabbat - because the event of Beneh Yisrael's designation of a sheep for the Pesach sacrifice marked their becoming G-d's children, a special stature that underlies our observance of Shabbat. Shabbat Ha'gadol thus celebrates our status of G-d's beloved children, an exalted status that we earn through our firm affirmation that we do not place our trust in anyone or anything other than the single Creator of the universe.

Lashon Hara's Focus on the Other



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
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The pasuk at the beginning of the parsha says, “This shall be the law of the *metzora* [מצרע]...” The Gemara has many frightening things to say about the various *aveiros* which cause *tzara'as*, particularly *lashon hara*. The Gemara says that the pasuk “the law of those who give others a bad reputation [reading *metzora* [מצרע] as a contraction of the words מוציא שם רע, bringing out a bad reputation] [hints that] anyone who says *lashon hara*, afflictions come upon him.” The Gemara continues on to say that “anyone who says *lashon hara*, it is if he denies G-d's existence” and that “he and I cannot live in the world [together].” It further says that “It was taught by the house of Rabbi Yishmael that the sin of anyone who says *lashon hara* is as bad as the three cardinal sins, idol worship, murder, and sexual immorality.” We understand that *lashon hara* is a severe sin but why is it so bad? Why is it like heresy and all of the worst sins?

It is almost Pesach. In order to approach the redemption, we must first understand how we got into exile. Reb Yerucham Levovitz, of Mir, ז"ל, explains that the essence of holiness is that a person must be internally focused and not externally focused. As the sefer Reishis Chochma says, “A person must make a fence within a fence so that he will not go outside to external [things].” The opposite of holiness, impurity, means focusing on outside, external things, and not internal matters. That is what exile means. Not being where one is supposed to be – which is internally focused.

Rashi tells us that Moshe was wondering what sin the Jewish people had committed to be subject to backbreaking labor, living in exile, outside the place where it belongs, unlike all of the other seventy nations. Why do the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov not live in their true home, Eretz Yisroel? We ask the same question even today. The question is even more pronounced because the Jewish nature is to keep our

focus in the proper place – that which is internal. Why then do we suffer in exile, outside of our true home?

When Moshe heard a Jew say, “Are you going to kill me like you killed the Egyptian?,” he began to see what went wrong with our people. They were informers, speakers of *lashon hara*. When he had to kill an Egyptian to save a Jew, he did so in front of a number of Jewish people and he had absolutely no concern that they would tell anyone. According to the Midrash Moshe said to them, “You are compared to sand. Just as [with regard to] sand, a person takes it from one place and places it somewhere where else and it makes no sound [during the transfer], so too this matter will remain hidden among you and it will not be heard.”

Now Moshe understood, “perhaps they are not worthy to be redeemed”. He said “There is *lashon hara* among them. How can they be worthy for redemption?” He previously thought the Jewish people were internally focused, concerned with their own relationship with Hashem. But when he saw that they were externally focused, gossiping about what others were doing, he saw that they were still immersed in impurity rather than holiness. Moshe could not understand how the holy nature of the Jewish people to remain internally focused had become perverted. But he knew that this was the secret of their exile. They revealed others' secrets and spoke *lashon hara*.

Chazal say that the Jewish people merited the redemption from Egypt because of four things: “they did not change their names, they did not change their language, they did not reveal their secrets, and they did not commit sexual immorality.” The secret of a Jew's modesty is staying internally focused, keeping secrets, remaining where he belongs, in his place. A Jew who talks about and concerns himself with everyone else's business is in exile and is no longer true to his inner nature. He is immersed in

the impurity of exile if he has an opinion about what everyone is doing and shares it with his friends. He is living outside his world, in his own personal diaspora.

On Pesach, the holiday of our redemption, we say in the Haggadah, “Blessed is the Omnipresent, blessed is He, blessed is he who gave the Torah to His nation, Israel.” The Torah is the antithesis of external wisdom, superficial writing, and an external focus. Its emphasis is on that which is internal, the redemption of what a Jew really is; one who is focused on the inner world of his relationship with Hashem.

That is why the sin of *lashon hara* is so devastating. It undermines the very essence of a Jew's nature because it places the focus on the superficial and the external; what everyone else in the world is doing and not on the most important secret of all, a Jew's inner relationship with Hashem. That is why, during the redemption, the mitzva of the hour was “you shall not go out, any man, from the entrance of his house until morning.” One must remain inside. That is the secret of redemption.

That is why a *metzora*, one who spoke *lashon hara*, must go outside the camps of the Jewish people. His punishment is measure for measure. Just as he was too externally focused, he must now go *outside* the Jewish camp. His purification process is that he is “brought to the kohein.” The kohein is the tzadik, the one who is connected to the Holy of Holies, the most internal place, the place of connection with the Master of the World. He must go back to his true nature, which is a focus on his inner world, and not on what others are doing. At this point in his process, he returns home by reconnecting with his inner power to focus on modesty and that which is internal and holy. By doing so, he separates from the external world of impurity, *tzara'as*, and exile. May we also merit reconnecting to our inner world and leaving externality behind.

Why Do We Love Gossip?



Rabbi YY Jacobson
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The Torah section of this week, Metzora discusses the laws of tzaraas, usually translated as "leprosy." Tzaraas was an illness whose identifying mark was a white patch (or patches) appearing on the skin of a person, the walls of a home or on a garment. This patch, plus several secondary symptoms, determined the person as being temporarily "impure" and required him or her to separate from the public and undergo an intense program of introspection and moral healing.

Once the symptoms of the illness were gone, a detailed process of purification would begin, following which the person was deemed pure once again and restored to his untarnished condition.

A unique and strange service was employed for this task. Two birds were brought forth. One was slaughtered with its blood poured into an earthenware vessel of spring water; the other bird, together with a piece of cedarwood, crimson thread (a wool dyed with pigment made from an insect or snail) and hyssop (a very low plant) were dipped into the blood-water mixture and sprinkled upon the person being purified, seven times. The second bird was then sent free "upon the open field."

What is the significance behind this apparently bizarre ritual?

The sages explain: Because the plague of tzaraas (leprosy) comes in punishment for evil and malicious talk, defaming another human being which is an act of chatter, therefore birds are needed for his purification because birds chatter continuously with a twittering sound."

The question, of course, is why is the chattering of birds symbolic of disparaging talk? And why was one bird sacrificed while the other was set free to continue its life?

What is unique about the chattering of birds is that many of them imitate human speech. Talking birds have varying degrees

of intelligence and communication capabilities. Some, like the crow, a highly intelligent bird, are only able to mimic a few words and phrases, while some budgerigars have been observed to have a vocabulary of more than one thousand words.

As a young child, each day at 4:00 p.m. when I would return home from school, our resident parrot waited to greet me. As I entered the door, Skoopy—as we named him—would begin jumping around his cage and excitedly chirp my name "Yosef Yitzchak." Now, Skoopy could not say "Yosef Yitzchak," my full name (even many of my friends have difficulty calling me by my two names), so he would instead call me: "Tsfeetzak." It was delightful to return home each afternoon having my name repeated some 20 times with so much zest!

Skoopy grew old, fell ill, and died one day. My mother and I buried Skoopy in the backyard of our Brooklyn home. I bid farewell to good old Skoopy, knowing that no one would call me "Tsfeetzak" again, nor would anyone pronounce my name twenty times when I would return from school.

Despite my warm feelings for Skoopy, like most parrots, she could only mimic fragments of my name. Even the birds that know how to imitate human conversation could usually learn to chatter only fragments of human dialogue.

This is why the Torah employs the birds in attempting to heal us from malicious talk. When we speak disparagingly about other people, the conversation may be clever, engaging and certainly "juicy." Yet the words being spoken are broken, coming from human beings who are themselves broken. Individuals engaged in negative conversation about others are akin to birds: they are mimicking human language; they may even be employing sophisticated verbiage, but in truth, their words are not human compositions; they merely imitate human beings.

Great people talk about ideas; ordinary people talk about things; small people talk about other people. When you are in touch with your humaneness, your words carry a ring of majesty and dignity to them. Your words are candid, real, deep, pure, coming from the humanness within your being. Not accidentally does the Targum (the authoritative Aramaic translation of the Bible) translate the phrase "a living creature", descriptive of the first man, as "a speaking spirit" (ruach memallelah). To be human is to emulate the Divine who created the universe through words. We too have the power to create worlds, embrace souls and heal hearts through words. Each word we use can be a conduit for love and for blessings.

But when we are scared of being human—genuinely human—we resort to malicious talk that defames and degrades other people. In our desperate need to feel better about ourselves, we describe the lowliness of others. In our pressing need to muse ourselves, we cut down others.

Slander stems from boredom, or insecurity, or apathy, or inner negativity. All of these qualities are indicative of impoverished, broken spirit. It is no wonder why following such a conversation an incurable emptiness sets into our psyche. G-d created the world through words and He gave us the power to destroy it through words. When we employ that power, we ourselves also feel broken.

The Talmud says: "Evil speech kills three people: the person who says it, the person about whom it is said, and the person who listens to it—and the person who listens to it is worse than the one who says it."

The healing of the leper involves two birds. One bird is slaughtered and its blood poured into a container of spring water. This represents the blood and destruction caused by malicious talk and how it tarnishes the vibrancy and freshness of life.

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Small Opening, Big Shabbat



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

“**B**ut [first] I will step forward to contend against you, and I will act as a relentless accuser.”

The late Rabbi Wolba asks an obvious question about this verse from the Haftarah read on Shabbat HaGadol: Such words are exactly the words appropriate for Shabbat Teshuvah, before the Day of Judgment, Yom Kippur! Not only that, in the Haftarah of Shabbat Teshuvah are words that are exactly appropriate for Shabbat HaGadol: “I greatly rejoice in the LORD, for I had planned a day of vengeance, and My year of redemption arrived”

What is the connection between the two Shabbatot?

It turns out that they are very related.

“On the tenth day of the month” Bnei Yisrael will bring an offering for Pesach, which immediately reminds us of the 10th day of Aseret Yemei Teshuvah - the end of the ten days of repentance.

Shabbat HaGadol is similar to Shabbat Shuva, both of which are named after their special Haftarah.

The search for misdeeds and the reckoning of the mind will remind you exactly of the search in every corner.

The wording of “Kol hamira ve-hami'a” immediately evokes an association with the canonical words of the opening of Yom Kippur: “Kol Nidrei - All the vows

and things we have made forbidden on ourselves... May they not be valid or exist any longer!” And during biyur chametz: “to nullify and it should be like the dust of the Earth.”

White clothing marks both the Seder evening and Yom Kippur.

On both the Leil HaSeder and Yom Kippur, we will encounter the “Seder Avodah” from which one should not deviate. Achat VeAchat - one by one, Kadesh, Urchartz.

The Piyyut “Chad Gadya Chad Gadya” mentions the two goats of Yom Kippur, one for Hashem, one for Azazel.

The climax of the Seder will be in the words of the Piyyut: “Who knows thirteen” we mouth the same “thirteen midaya” on Yom Kippur, which are 13 midot of rachamim - mercy...

What connects these two days!

It seems to me that only around the two festivals, Yom Kippur and Seder Eve, there is a consensus within the people of Israel. Without understanding why these two days pull thick layers of cynicism from us. The people of Israel point to the idea that we want to be connected.

Connected to the people, connected to family, connected to tradition and yes, also connected to the common father of us all, connected in a big way and perhaps that is the idea embodied in “Shabbat HaGadol”. It is true that not

everyone who observes these days is considered “religious” because he follows the mitzvot exactly, and even the Bnei Yisrael were not considered “religious” on this Shabbat, the mythological one. It is true that our connection to Judaism is sometimes “BaGadol” - most of the time, but it is these times that will reveal that great heart that beats in all of us, the heart that brings the fathers back to the sons and the sons back to their fathers.

The failures we have committed will be void like the dust of the earth, all our vows and prohibitions will not be valid and will not exist. And we will forgive all people, on a grand scale.

On Leil HaSeder we say the text of Shir HaShirim, “Maidens love you!” Chazal explain that “maidens” are people who come from worlds so different from “our” world, and yet they will come from the end of the world to the Seder table, to the synagogue on Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is “the terrible day.” The coming Shabbat will be “the great day,” and it seems to me that the people of Israel should already know the words, “Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Eternal comes,” and they will stand there, on the great day and the terrible day, and testify before G-d as relentless accusers: and they will say, “And My year of redemption has come.”

Continued from previous page

Now the second bird is dipped into the blood and then sent free to continue to chirp freely. What this symbolizes is that now we must learn how to sublimate our fragmented words and their broken consequences. It is not enough to stop talking; rather, we need to go back and transform our fragmented

language into wholesome communication; our mediocre conversations into authentic dialogue.

The second bird teaches us that we are accountable not only for our evil speech; we are also called to task for all the words we

could have said but we did not. “The word you had not sense to say, who knows how grand it might have rung?” The second bird is thus sent away to the field in order to chirp and spread the importance of gentle healing and positive speech.

The Steps of Inspiration



Charlie Harary

This Shabbos has a special component. It is called Shabbos HaGadol. It is the Shabbos before Pesach and it commemorates the miracle of the Jewish people just before they left Egypt.

The Tur (Orach Chaim, Siman 430) says: שבת שלפני הפסח קורין אותו שבת הגדול והטעם לפי שנעשה בו נס גדול שפסח מצרים מקחו בעשור כדכתיב בעשור לחודש הזה ויקחו להם שה לבית אבות שה לבית אבות ופסח שיצאו ישראל ממצרים היה ביום ה' כדאיתא בסדר עולם ונמצא ש' בחדש היה שבת ולקחו להם כל אחד שה לפסחו וקשר אותו בכרעי מטתו ושאלום המצריים למה זה לכם והשיבו לשחטו לשם פסח במצות השם עלינו והיו שיניהם קהות על ששוחטין את אלהיהן ולא היו רשאים לומר להם דבר ועל שם אותו הנס קורין אותו שבת הגדול

Just before the Jews left Egypt, they were commanded to take with them the Korban Pesach, the god of the Egyptians. And the miracle happened that although the Egyptians wanted to hurt and kill the Jews, Hashem prevented it. Shabbos HaGadol comes to qualify the miracle – the nes – Shabbos HaNes HaGadol - the great miracle.

The question is, why did G-d have to do this? Why did Hashem require the Jews to take the Korban Pesach before they left Egypt? If you wanted them to have a moment to commemorate the vacation, to commemorate the event, to celebrate a Seder, it would have been easier to do so after they left Egypt. They brought all the livestock with them anyway. They could have sat together in the families after they left, benachas and held a whole event to remember everything that happened. They could have told the story and remembered what happened. So why did they have to do that before they moved out when they were not even free?

The answer gives us a glimpse of how Hashem works with us in the world.



Shabbos HaGadol comes to qualify the miracle - the nes - Shabbos HaNes HaGadol - the great miracle.

Rabbi Akiva Tatz talks about this in his book “Living Inspired” in relation to the desert experience. And the same approach applies here. If you notice something amazing, it's that Hashem shows up in the form of Moshe as His representative and starts bringing plagues to the Egyptians with no strings attached. The Jews do not have to do anything. The Jews just sit back and watch. Just before they are about to leave, Hashem turns to them and says, "I want you to take the Korban Pesach." Why?

Because the sheep was the god of the Egyptians. The Jews were in Egypt for 230 years. Presumably, they adopted the gods of their homeland or their host country. What Hashem was saying is that you have to take the thing you relied on and slaughter it. You have to take the support, you have to take the gods that you relied on for so many years and slaughter them. This was the most difficult thing they had to do, especially in front of their masters. This is called "esa'aruta de'letata – the awakening from below." First, G-d sends you a free inspiration. Then He asks you to do something really difficult. And when you do that, then comes the night of Makas Bechoros, when Hashem sees:

Who did it? Who has the blood on his doorpost? And saves them. And that is called "Esa'arusa de'leila – awakening from above".

If you look at life, you will find that these three steps repeat themselves. Inspiration from Hashem as a gift, then the removal of the inspiration, followed by a request from the person below to bring about an awakening, an action. And then follows an even greater gift. The Jews move into the desert and Hashem splits the sea. Inspiration. An incredible gift. The Jews were so inspired that they sang as soon as they left the sea. And then Hashem takes away the inspiration and leaves them sitting in the desert. And then, when they have worked on themselves in the desert, He gives them something greater: the Torah.

We see this over and over again in history. G-d gives us something, makes us work for it, and then gives us something even greater. This happens in our lives as well. We feel inspired and the inspiration passes, and Hashem then sees if we are willing and able to work for the things we need to do – to slay the beliefs that are holding us back. And when we do, He gives us even more. This way out of Egypt was not just once. This is the way of freedom that lasts forever. And we begin to commemorate it this weekend with Shabbos HaGadol.

● Edited by Ian Schwartz.

Metzora / Shabbos haGadol



Rabbi Judah Mischel

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The *tzadik* Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz, zy'a, was known for his exalted sense of humor and frank, insightful observations. A dedicated *chasid* and attendant of the Chozeh of Lublin, the Ropshitzer was also a brilliant scholar and orator in his own right.

On the Shabbos preceding Pesach, the custom in *Klal Yisrael* is for rabbanim to share insights about the upcoming holiday and to encourage the community to provide for each other's Yom Tov needs by donating *maos chitin*, "money for wheat" to make matzos.

One Shabbos haGadol Reb Naftali returned home from the shul and was greeted by his wife. "So *nu*, how did your *drasha* go?" "It was "fine," Reb Naftali responded, shrugging his shoulders. The Ropshitzer Rebbetzin frowned in surprise. "Fine?! It's one of your most important *drashos* of the year! How could it be just 'fine'? Was it successful or not?"

"What can I say?" sighed Reb Naftali, "I spoke from the heart, but am afraid that I was only half *matzliach* — yes, in fact, I was exactly fifty percent successful..."

"What do you mean? How can a *drasha* be 'fifty percent' *matzliach*?"

"Well, you see, I spoke about *maos chitim*. And *baruch Hashem*, I was successful in convincing the poor to receive *tzedakah*. The thing is, I was not successful in convincing the wealthy to give it..."



The Rema begins his commentary on the laws of Pesach by focusing our attention on providing for our neighbors:

ומנהג לקנות חטים לחלקן לעניים לצורך פסח.

"...There is a custom of buying and distributing wheat to provide for their Pesach needs." (*Orach Chayim*, 429:1)

Placing the act of kindness of *maos chitin* at the forefront of our holiday preparations not only focuses our priorities, but it gives us a visceral experience of the impact of Pesach. When we provide matzah and Pesach food to those who need assistance, we remember how we suffered, how we 'lacked provisions' as we left *Mitzrayim*. We develop a sensitivity to others, modeled after Hashem's sensitivity to us, and how He provided what we needed as we walked into the Desert.

The system of establishing *chagim* and *moadim* depends on our identifying and sanctifying the new moon:

אַלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי ה' מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם,
"These are Hashem's appointed, *Mikra'ei Kodesh*, 'holy occasions', which you shall designate in their appointed times." (*Vayikra*, 23:4)

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (*Lekutei Moharan*, 2:4) explains that *Mikra'ei Kodesh*, literally, "Declarations of Sanctity", also means 'callings to holiness'. This is because Hashem's will is revealed through each of the *Yamim Tovim*, and each one 'calls' us toward the will of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, as it is manifest in that specific season and moment.

While sharing Torah with the *chevreh* in the House of Love and Prayer in San Francisco, on Erev Pesach of 1973, Reb Shlomo Carlebach, zy'a, shone his unique light on Rebbe Nachman's teaching. He said it is as if Yom Tov is standing on the street corner, calling out to anyone in the world who will listen: '*Kodesh!* Hashem is beyond nature! There are holy miracles and signs of His presence all around us!' The more clearly we hear this calling, the deeper we connect with and feel the transcendent joy of Yom Tov. On the other hand, if *chas v'shalom* our *simchas Yom Tov* is lacking, it means that we didn't really hear those *Mikra'ei Kodesh*, those "calls of '*Kodesh!*'"

'My sweetest friends, how do you get the ears to hear Yom Tov calling? By giving *tzedakah*, charity to the poor, before Pesach.

When we train our ears to hear the crying of those in need, our ears become refined, and on Yom Tov we'll be able to hear G-d calling out to us. But if our ears are not open to the crying of the poor, we will not hear G-d calling to us either.'

As we approach Pesach and invest much time and energy into *bedikas chometz*, we should know that halacha requires us to search *עד שיידו מגעת*, "just until where one's hand reaches". This means that places that are truly inaccessible need not be examined or cleaned.

A couple of days before Yom Tov, Rav Yehoshua Eizek Shapiro, zy'a, known as Rav Eizel Charif of Slonim, noticed a member of his community — an infamously wealthy miser — examining his pants pockets and emptying them of bits of *chametz*. Rav Eizel remarked, "Surely you are aware of the halachos of *bedikas chametz*..."

"Of course, Rabbi!" cried the miser, proud of his piety, "that's why I'm digging out the crumbs in my pockets, so I'll be ready for Pesach!"

"But my dear friend," Rav Eizel said, "A person is only *mechuyav*, obligated, to search *עד שיידו מגעת*, 'until where his hand reaches...' You and I both know that when it comes to *tzedakah*, your hand does not reach all the way into your pockets. So don't even bother, you have no obligation to check them!"

Even if we piously empty our pockets of crumbs, if we haven't emptied our pockets for others, we won't be ready for the true holiness of Yom Tov.

May we open our ears and hearts to the quiet 'calls' for assistance of our brothers and sisters — and in this way internalize 100% of the Ropshitzer's Shabbos haGadol *Drasha*. May we heed the 'calls' of Yom Tov: 'Please, come to holiness! Please give *maos chitin*. Dig deep into your pockets, and share a little bit of redemption with others!'

Peddlers Preaching

Mrs. Shira Smiles

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The Medrash relates that a peddler was once hawking his wares near Tzipori and began to shout, “Who wants to buy an elixir of life?” Rabbi Yannai, an Amora approached. The peddler pointed to the verse in Tehilim, “Who is the man who desires life... Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Rabbi Yannai seemed to be awestricken, saying, “All my life I read this verse and I did not understand how to interpret it until this peddler came along.

Why was Rabbi Yannai so taken? Rabbi Pincus z”l posits that sometimes when something is so obvious, we completely overlook its deep meaning. This gift of simplicity was the gift of a simple peddler, writes the Birkat Mordechai, he opened the eyes of Rav Yannai to the profundity of this verse.

The Meirosh Tzurim quotes the Ishbetzir Rav that perhaps in fact the peddler had once been a gossip, but when he did teshuvah, he felt a new lease on life and wanted to share it with others. Rabbi Yannai had never seen anyone who actually exemplified this verse so completely. It was this realization that so impressed the Amora.

The Be’er Moshe writes that according to the Gemara in Avodah Zoro, the peddler was Rabbi Alexander who was teaching another aspect of the verse. “Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it.” It is not enough just to avoid evil. One must also pursue good. It is not enough for the metzora to go to the priest and go through some ritual. He must actively seek the good in others, use his tongue to encourage others, and use his power of speech for prayer and Torah study.

When one refrains from sin, writes Letitcha Elyon, one receives merit. But that

is not the same as merit for performing a mitzvah. Loshon horo is different, however, for when one is refraining from loshon horo, one is actually sanctifying his mouth, and as such, he receives merit and reward not only for refraining from sin but also for the positive aspect of sanctification.



**It is not enough just to avoid evil.
One must also pursue good.**

Rabbi Frand elucidates the Chida’s interpretation of this Medrash. The peddler did not ask, “Who seeks life?” He asked, “Who seeks an elixir of life.” In other words, how can one preserve his life. Citing the Chovos Halevovos, he explains that when we ascend to heaven the accounting of our mitzvot and aveirot will not seem accurate. However, it will be explained that whenever we spoke loshon horo of someone, we are credited with his aveirot and when others spoke loshon horo about us, we are credited with their mitzvot. The peddler’s lesson was that guarding one’s tongue preserves the mitzvot to oneself so they will never be credited to another.

The Sichot Eliyahu connects Parshat Metzora and Sefirah. Citing the Maharsha, he notes that the disciples all died of ascarah, the same plague that afflicted the spies in the desert. The spies died for speaking loshon horo and Rabbi Akiva’s disciples died for the same reason. They too spoke loshon horo about each other and didn’t treat each other with respect.

The Sefirah period was originally a time of great anticipation and hope. Forty-nine days leading from our redemption from Egypt to receiving the Torah on the fiftieth day of Revelation. In Pirkei Avot, we are told there are forty-eight ways to acquire the Torah, one path corresponding to each day of the journey, with the last day reserved for review. Many of these paths, or characteristics, seem to have more to do with interpersonal relations than with traditional studying, yet they are important to acquire Torah properly. If these disciples were remiss in these characteristics, how could they truly acquire the Torah which would be given at the end of this time frame? After all, these are qualities that represent the fundamentals of a Torah personality.

What separates humans from animals is the power of thought and speech that is often defined as the soul G-d breathed into us. It gives us the power to connect to humans and to Hashem Himself. If we want to bring G-d’s presence down to earth, we must guard our speech, for loshon horo distances us from G-d and sends His presence back to heaven, writes Rabbi Wolbe z”l. At this time of year, when we are moving toward spirituality, we must take our physical mouths and dedicate them to holy words. After all, the verse tells us netzor leshoncha meira/ guard your tongue from evil. But the connotation of netzor is guarding something precious, unlike shamor/guard, which implies guarding against something negative. Our power of speech is a precious gift that we must continuously guard to keep pure.

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin
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Parashat Metzora continues with the laws of *tzara'at*. It includes a section of what to do when a discoloration is found in a house. In Vayikra 14:37, we find the following instructions for the kohen:

וְרָאָה אֶת־הַנֶּגַע וְהֵנָּה הַנֶּגַע בְּקִירֵת הַבַּיִת שֶׁקַּעְרוּרֹת
יִרְקְרוּ אוֹ אֲדָמָדָמֹת וּמְרֵאֵיהֶן שָׁפֵל מִן־הַקִּיר:

This can be rendered in English as:

“He shall examine the plague [to determine if] the plague on the wall of the house consists of penetrating streaks that are *yerakrakot* or *adamdamot*, which appear to be below [the surface of] the wall.”

I haven't translated two of the words, *יִרְקְרוּ* and *אֲדָמָדָמֹת*, so we can examine how our perception of their meanings has changed over time.

Each of those words is based on a color, *יֶרֶק* and *אָדָם*, with the last two letters

repeated (a linguistic process called “reduplication.”). In modern Hebrew, that generally indicates a paler or lighter version of the color. So *אֲדָמָדָם* is “reddish” and *יִרְקְרֶק* is “light green” or “greenish.” That is how the verse is translated in some English editions of the Torah – “greenish or reddish streaks.” It follows the opinion of Ibn Ezra on Vayikra 13:49.

However, Rashi on that same verse, following the midrash, says that reduplication indicates a strengthening of the colors – the “greenest of the green” and the “reddest of the red.” Despite the usage found in modern Hebrew, many scholars today say that Rashi's opinion is more likely to be correct. They therefore translate the phrase as “bright green or bright red streaks.”

However, this is not the only issue with translating *יִרְקְרֶק* as “greenish.” That translation assumes that *יֶרֶק* is “green.” That's certainly how it is used in Hebrew today. But it's just as likely that *יֶרֶק* originally meant “yellow.” We can see this by the only other Biblical use of *יִרְקְרֶק*. In Tehilim 68:14, we find the phrase *בִּירְקָרֶק* - *קָרוֹץ*. That's generally translated as “in fine gold.” Gold is much more likely to be yellow than green. And other Semitic languages, like Ugaritic and South Arabian, have a cognate word that means the color gold.

So how did we end up with *יֶרֶק* as green? Perhaps it originally referred to a spectrum of yellow to green, which included both colors. But due to the influence of the related word *יָקָר* - “vegetation,” i.e., “greens,” Hebrew assigned *יֶרֶק* to “green,” and had *צָהָב* become the word for “yellow.”

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

Find four different expressions used in Parshat Metzora for washing/cleansing with water.

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

Word	Meaning	Reference
יָטַח	bathe	Multiple times
יָסָח	wash	Multiple times
שָׁחַץ	rinse	15:11
יָטַח	dip	14:51



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West Coast Torah Center
Young Israel of North Beverly Hills
YULA High School
Young Israel of Century City

COLORADO

DAT Minyan
East Denver Orthodox Synagogue
The Denver Kehillah

CONNECTICUT

Beth David Synagogue
Congregation Agudath Sholom
Young Israel of West Hartford

FLORIDA

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

GEORGIA

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Congregation Ohr HaTorah

HAWAII

Kehilat Olam Ejad Ganim

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Pikesville Jewish Congregation
Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation

MASSACHUSETTS

Congregation Beth El Atereth Israel
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

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Yeshivat Kadimah High School Nusach
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Yavneh Academy
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Young Israel of Teaneck

NEW YORK

Congregation Anshei Shalom
Kol Hatorah Kulah
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
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 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

OHIO

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

PENNSYLVANIA

Shaare Torah Congregation

SOUTH CAROLINA

Brith Sholom Beth Israel
Congregation Dor Tikvah

TENNESSEE

Baron Hirsch Congregation

TEXAS

Robert M. Beren Academy
United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston

VIRGINIA

Keneseth Beth Israel

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