

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors, Jane and Morris Mayer, in commemoration of the first *yahrzeit* of Morris's mother, Miriam Mayer, מרים זיסל בת צבי ע"ה, on the 6th of Iyar. May her *neshama* have an *Aliyah* and may Jane and Morris be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha* and *hatzlacha*, and good health.

Mazel Tov to Chaim and Rikki Ambinder on the Bar Mitzva of their son Avi. Mazel Tov to Avi's grandparents, Aryeh and Sandy Guttenberg, and Jeffrey and Melanie Ambinder and to his great grandmothers, Mrs. Chaiky Guttenberg and Mrs. Dorothy Klein.

Parshios Tazria and Metzora outline the complex laws and details of *tzaraas*, usually translated as Biblical leprosy. The **Gemara in Arachin 16a** says it is the punishment for seven specific sins.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ערכין דף טז עמוד א

א"ר שמואל בר נחמני א"ר יוחנן על שבעה דברים נגעים באין: על לשון הרע, ועל שפיכות דמים, ועל שבועת שוא, ועל גילוי עריות, ועל גסות הרוח, ועל הגזל, ועל צרות העין.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani says that Rabbi Yohanan says: Leprous marks come and afflict a person for seven sinful matters: For malicious speech, for bloodshed, for an oath taken in vain, for forbidden sexual relations, for arrogance, for theft, and for stinginess.

These seven sins all trace back to one root cause—a **complete disregard for others**; a disdain for others' rights. It is an attitude of putting yourself before everyone else, which leads to the breakdown of society--a contempt for responsibilities בין אדם לחבירו, between people.

The **Gemara in Arachin 16b** supports this broad understanding because the *metzora* must dwell outside the camp during his time of *tzaraas*. He is exiled, in a sense, because his actions, through any of these seven specific sins, led to the destruction of homes, friendships, and society. He has contributed to a breakdown of society, so he is separated from the very society he helped tear down. In that way, he can experience the isolation and detachment that he caused.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ערכין דף טז עמוד ב

בעא מיניה רבי שמואל בר נדב מרבי חנינא, ואמרי לה רבי שמואל בר נדב חתניה דרבי חנינא מרבי חנינא, ואמרי לה מרבי יהושע בן לוי: מה נשתנה מצורע שאמרה תורה בדד ישב מחוץ למחנה מושבו? הוא הבדיל בין איש לאשתו בין איש לרעהו, לפיכך אמרה תורה: בדד ישב וגו'.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nadav asked Rabbi Hanina, and some say that it was Rabbi Shmuel bar Nadav, the son-in-law of Rabbi Hanina, who asked of Rabbi Hanina, and some say that he asked it of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: What is different and notable about a leper, that the Torah states: "He shall dwell alone; outside of the camp shall be his dwelling" (Leviticus 13:46)? He replied: By speaking malicious speech he separated between husband and wife and between one person and another; therefore, he is punished with leprosy, and the Torah says: "He shall dwell alone; outside of the camp shall be his dwelling."

These seven sins are *lashon hara*, killing, swearing falsely, sexual immorality, haughtiness, stealing, and jealousy. They all stem from an inability to make room for the needs and rights of others in a person's worldview.

If these sins lead to a break down in society, one might infer that the inverse is true, as well. Society can be built, and strengthened, by speaking nicely about others, respecting another person's right to life, speaking the truth about others, being loyal to a spouse, showing humility, respecting and protecting other people's property, and having the ability to be happy for others.

The weeks between Pesach and Shavuot are a time to prepare for Mattan Torah. We would think that preparing for this momentous event would mean working on המקום, בין אדם למקום, but the **Gemara in Yevamos 62b** teaches that it is a time to work on creating a society that can be home to a Torah society—a society of respect.

ר"ע אומר: למד תורה בילדותו – ילמוד תורה בזקנותו, היו לו תלמידים בילדותו – יהיו לו תלמידים בזקנותו, שנא': בבקר זרע את זרעך וגו'. אמרו: שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים היו לו לרבי עקיבא, מגבת עד אנטיפרס, וכולן מתו בפרק אחד מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה, והיה העולם שמם, עד שבא ר"ע אצל רבותינו שבדרום, ושנאה להם.

They said, by way of example, that Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of students in an area of land that stretched from Gevat to Antipatris in Judea, and they all died in one period of time, because they did not treat each other with respect.

Why is disrespect such a serious sin, warranting the obliteration of so many Torah scholars?

There are different approaches to answer this question. **Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev**, in his *Kedushas Levi*, writes that within בין אדם למקום, בין אדם להבירו lies a true expression of honoring Hashem. He points to the *Pasuk* 'אני ה' כמוך ואהבת לרעך, and says the expectation of loving and respecting others is built on the understanding that we are all connected to one another through our relationship to our Creator, Hashem. Disrespecting others is tantamount to disrespecting Hashem.

But other thinkers take a more practical view. For example, **Rav Eliezer Sadan** in his Haggada (p. 21) writes *“The world cannot be changed by individuals alone. Individuals on their own cannot affect humanity as a whole or change the course of history. Nations are the actors who weave the fabric of history. From Adam Harishon until the time of Avraham Avinu there lived many great individuals who had no influence on the course of history. Noach, Shem, and Ever were outstanding figures, prophets to whom Hashem spoke directly—yet they were unable to stop the moral decline of humanity that led to the disasters of the flood and the dispersion of mankind. It was only when Avraham Avinu left Ur Kasdim that Providence instituted a new plan for mankind: Hashem said to Avram, “Go...and I will make you a great nation.” The creation of a nation whose task it is to sanctify God’s name was destined to change the world.*

And it takes respect to build a society and a nation. It is noteworthy that Moshe Rabbeinu asked Hashem to choose a leader who would respect people’s differences, to lead the Jewish people into the Promised Land. In the words of **Rashi** (Bamidbar 27:16)

רש"י במדבר פרשת פינחס פרק כז פסוק טז

אלקי הרוחות - למה נאמר, אמר לפניו רבש"ע גלוי וידוע לפניך דעתו של כל אחד ואחד ואינן דומין זה לזה, מנה עליהם מנהיג שיהא סובל כל אחד ואחד לפי דעתו:

GOD OF THE SPIRITS [OF ALL FLESH] — Why is this expression used? He said to Him: “Lord of the Universe! the personality of each person is revealed to You, and no two are alike. Appoint over them a leader who will tolerate each person according to his individual character.

A functional society is built by recognizing and respecting differences, and learning how to work together.

We counter these seven sins that lead to *tzaraas*—not simply by refraining from them, but by doing the opposite—bringing into the world more kindness and compassion and respect of others.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe, the author of the mussar series *Alei Shur*, was one of the great educators and Torah thinkers of our generation. When I was learning in Israel, I had the opportunity to attend his *mussar shiur* in Yeshiva Kol Torah on *Motzei Shabbosos*. His wisdom and brilliance were hidden in the simplicity of his presentation.

A yeshiva student once came to Rav Wolbe and asked for advice and guidance in dealing with the challenge of *shemiras halashon* and refraining from *lashon hara*. A group of *talmidim* gathered around, awaiting his response, speculating on what it might be. Would the Mashgiach suggest that the student set an extra daily seder learning the laws of proper speech? Would he recommend adding a special prayer for success in that area, or perhaps advise him to conduct a *taanis dibbur* (refrain from speaking for a specific time period)?

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

Today’s *haftara* in **Melachim II**, Perek 7, teaches us this lesson, as well. Geichazi and his sons were *metzoraim*—sitting outside the city of Shomron, for the sin of self-absorption—*gasus ruach* (arrogance) and *gezel* (stealing), for putting their own needs ahead of the Jewish people’s needs.

They were sitting in isolation and, through Divine Providence, discovered that Hashem had performed a miracle. The enemy had abandoned their camp—leaving behind all their possessions and food.

ח. וַיָּבֹאוּ הַמְצֹרְעִים הָאֵלֶּה עַד-קֶצֶה הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-אֶהֱל אֶחָד וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיִּשְׂאוּ מִשָּׁם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וּבְגָדִים וַיִּלְכוּ וַיִּטְמְנוּ וַיִּשְׂבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-אֶהֱל אֲחֵר וַיִּשְׂאוּ מִשָּׁם וַיִּלְכוּ וַיִּטְמְנוּ:

When those lepers came to the edge of the camp, they went into one of the tents and ate and drank; then they carried off silver and gold and clothing from there and buried it. They came back and went into another tent, and they carried off what was there and buried it.

Their initial reaction was to keep everything for themselves. But then they had a change of heart...and shared the good news and spread the fortune to all the Jewish people.

ט. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ לֹא-כֵן | אֲנַחְנוּ עֹשִׂים הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יוֹם-בְּשֻׁרָה הוּא וְאֲנַחְנוּ מְחַשִּׁים וְחַכְיֵנו עַד-אֲזַר הַבֶּקֶר וּמִצָּאֵנוּ עֲגוֹן וְעַתָּה לָכֵן וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיַּגִּידוּ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא:

Then they said to one another, “We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, and we are keeping silent! If we wait until the light of morning, we shall incur guilt. Come, let us go and inform the king’s palace.”

The **Radak** translates לא כן as לא טוב—a phrase which appears two other times in Tanach...both times in the context of a human being’s need for the support of others: first, when Hashem created Chava to help Adam and, second, when Yisro recommended that Moshe Rabbeinu enlist the help of others in judging the nation. Geichazi and his sons realized that people are meant to help each other, and not just look out for their own self-interest.

רד"ק מלכים ב פרק ז פסוק ט

(ט) לא כן - לא טוב כתרגומו לא כשר מה דאנחנא עבדין:

בראשית פרק ב פסוק יח: וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹנֵן אֱלֹהִים לֹא-טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אַעֲשֶׂה-לּוֹ עֵצָר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:
שמות פרק יח פסוק יז: וַיֹּאמֶר חֲתָן מִלְּשָׁה אֵלָיו לֹא-טוֹב הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹשֶׂה:

This attitude was meant to be the response of a *metzora* to his miraculous punishment—looking for ways to be a positive influence on society. Through introspection, the *metzora* was meant to discover his responsibility to help build up others, and not tear them down.

Similarly, our response to seeing Hashem’s hand in our lives, the *יום בשורה* that we are living through, must be to reach out to others. To build a just and respectful society—to help one another—and to connect to one another—our people--the Jewish people. We are living in auspicious times. It is not clear what Hashem wants from us, but we must do our best to react appropriately and move forward productively.

I heard **Rav Moshe Taragin** speak this week about Yom Haatzmaut. He quoted **Rabbanit Chana Henkin’s** question to a group of seminary girls who had come to be *menachem avel* after her son and daughter-in-law were brutally murdered by Arab terrorists in 2015. She asked them “How many books are there in Tanach?” When they all answered 24, she corrected them and said—actually 25. The 25th is being written now...and she said that her children wrote a chapter in blood.

We are living in historic times—but we must open our eyes and see, and not be like those who are described as *עיינים להם ולא יראו*, having eyes but not seeing... We must truly see and respond to our times.

On November 29, 1947, when the UN General Assembly voted on the partition plan to grant the Jewish people a State in Palestine, the Chief Rabbinate declared that the next Shabbos, Hallel would be recited in Shul without a *bracha*.

That Shabbos, the Chief Rabbi of the British mandate of Palestine, **Rav Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi Herzog**, gave the following speech in Beit Haknesset Yeshurun :

זה היום עשה ה' נגילה ונשמחה בו. יום גדול הוא זה, ים אשר בו כל ישראל מסוף הכולם ועד סופו, שמחים בהלל ובהודיה. יום אשר בו מפעם כאחד לב האומה של כל הדורות, מהיום שגלינו מארצנו עד היום הזה, בחרדת קודש ובגיל עולמים לקראת גאולת ישראל ההולכת ומתקרבת. היום הזה נחשב במליצת חז"ל כ"אתחלתא דגאולה" אחיי ואחיותי, צו השעה הוא לפקוח עינים עוורות, ולראות ולהכיר את יד ה'. את ההשגחה המיוחדת על בית ישראל. צו השעה הוא לכונן את המדינה היהודית מצים בין חייו על יסודות דבר ה', יסודות התורה.
*This is the day Hashem has made, let us rejoice and be happy. It is a great day, a day when all the Jewish people are filled with happiness and gratitude. **This is the day when the heart of the Jewish people beats with the unity of all generations—from the day of our exile until today.** With holy trepidation and eternal joy, we greet the ultimate redemption which is approaching. This day is considered to be “the beginning of the redemption.” My brothers and sisters—the task of the hour is to open our eyes and see and recognize the undeniable Hand of Hashem and His special providence over the Jewish people. The task of the hour is to prepare the Jewish state to be built upon the principles of Hashem’s word, a foundation of Torah.*

Today is the 5th of Iyar. On this day 73 years ago, in 1948, with the proclamation of a Jewish state, Jews throughout the world were able to hold their heads up high, everywhere. As **Rav Avraham Eliyahu (Elya) Kaplan**, a close *talmid* of the Alter of Slabodka and Rosh Yeshiva of the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin, said in a tribute he gave in Telz, Lithuania, to Theodore Herzl: *He did not teach us Torah; he did not teach us Halacha or Aggada. He did not teach us any Jewish studies nor Mussar (Jewish ethics), as he was never taught these subjects. He was raised in surroundings where this knowledge did not exist. **However, he taught us two words, words that we never dared to pronounce (Yona 1:9): “Ivri anokhi,” “I am a Jew!”** In our Beis Medrash we could make this claim, we could even write it in our newspapers; but there was one place in which we could not, in the international arena.*

This pride was restored to Jews worldwide on 5 Iyar 1948. And our response to open miracles—to the miraculous restoration of Jewish dignity and pride that continues to this day through the existence of a Jewish State--must be to strengthen our connection to the Jewish people, to build a foundation of kindness and compassion. To practice *לזה לזה*, truly honor others—and build a kind and just community and society, built on Torah values.

And not surprisingly, Israel has done just that. The Jewish state is a model for the world in spreading kindness. They are always the first to respond to humanitarian crises throughout the world. I recently saw an amazing statistic: As of April 14, the nonprofit Israeli organization Matnat Chaim (Gift of Life) has facilitated 1,004 live kidney transplants since 2009 from altruistic donors, people who are not related to their recipients. Israel has the fourth highest rate of live kidney donations in the world and the highest [per-capita] rate of altruistic kidney donations.

Yom Haatzmaut, especially in these historic times, is a call to all of us. It is a time for each of us to ask: What will be my place in this 25th book of Tanach? What am I doing to connect to and perfect the Jewish people? How am I helping to shape our shul and community? What chessed and volunteer work can I do? To paraphrase Rav Wolbe, “*Do I perform three acts of kindness, share a good word, a compliment or word of encouragement with someone I meet, every day?*”

May we learn from the lessons of *tzaraas* to do our part to build society, by spreading warmth and kindness, respect and love, for one another. And may we merit to see the *Geula Shleima...bimhera viyamenu*, amen.