

On Thursday night we counted 15<sup>th</sup> day of the Omer. Count the next number for Shabbat on Friday night

### Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 13 #27, April 17-18, 2026; 1 Iyar 5786; Tazria-Metzora 5786; Rosh Hodesh Iyar.  
Yom HaZikaron Tuesday, April 21; Yom Ha'Atzmaut April 22

**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

---

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

---

**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.**

---

During a non-leap year, we read Tazria-Metzora very soon after the end of Pesach. Rabbi David Fohrman and his colleagues at alephbeta.org focus on numerous connections between this double parsha and Pesach. Tzaraat, certain kinds of blemishes on a person's skin, clothes, or house, is a fairly common plague among B'Nai Yisrael during the Exodus and period after entering Israel. Chazal consider tzaraat to be punishment for various types of social diseases, especially for lashon hora (evil speech). A metzora (one suffering from tzaraat) must consult a Kohen for diagnosis, and if confirmed, leave the camp or town for a week at a time, warn others not to come near, and perform teshuvan until a Kohen verifies that the tzaraat is gone.

Once cured of tzaraat, the metzora must perform a purification ritual involving two birds (one killed for the blood and the other set free), cedar wood, hyssop, a scarlet thread, and cleansing in a mikvah. Rabbi Fohrman observes the similarity between the purification of a metzora and the Korban Pesach, the ritual required of all Jews in Egypt the night before the tenth plague and freeing of the Jews to leave Egypt and head toward Canaan (Israel). The Korban Pesach includes slaughtering a male lamb or goat less than a year old, collecting the blood, dipping a bundle of hyssop in the blood, and painting the blood on the door posts. After the purification ritual, the metzora or Jewish slave becomes free to join his fellow Jews. Rabbi Fohrman observes that there are two sides to the tenth plague. With the death of the first born males of Egypt, the country loses the leaders of the next generation, those who normally would connect the new generation to the past generations. In that sense, the tenth plague is the beginning of the collapse of the nation of Egypt. At the same time, we have the beginning of the free nation of B'Nai Yisrael.

In the only case of a Jew coping with tzaraat in the Torah, Miriam (Moshe's sister) speaks lashon hora against Moshe (or his wife) and immediately displays tzaraat on her body. Aharon goes to Moshe and asks him to pray for Miriam's recovery. He describes their sister as appearing like a dead newborn with the white skin appearing as if her body does not have any blood. Chazal interpret a metzora as being like a dead person. Rabbi Fohrman interprets this condition as a person alive in a physical sense but dead socially. The week long isolation is to give the person time to perform teshuvah, go through the purification ritual, and then reclaim the status of a socially alive person.

The purification ritual of the Korban Pesach also brings the former Jewish slaves into freedom, where they connect with fellow newly freed Jews. Rabbi Fohrman adds another connection. After the ninth plague on the Egyptians, God tells Moshe that he will bring one more "nega" on the Egyptians (Shemot 11:1). This statement is the first time the Torah uses the term "nega," and the next time is in connection with tzaraat (Vayikra 13:2). Rabbi Fohrman states that we are to infer a

connection between the plague of the killing of the first born of the Egyptians and tzaraat.

Rabbi Fohrman also connects the Exodus with the story of Yosef and his brothers. After Yaakov sends Yosef to check on his brothers, they strip him of his special coat, kill an animal and put its blood on the coat, and leave Yosef in a pit. Rashi says that the brothers leave brotherhood behind – Yosef is alone socially, essentially a metzora. Late in his life, Yosef makes the brothers promise to take his bones when they leave Egypt for Israel. By taking Yosef's bones with them, B'Nai Yisrael are returning Yosef to the family – essentially purifying Yosef and returning him to the family.

The Torah contains seventy levels of depth, and it is our task to probe to uncover much of the richness that a surface reading misses. Outside the frum community, many Jews consider Tazria/Metzora to be very boring, irrelevant to current generations, and one of the worst choices for a Bar Mitzvah parsha. To me, after many years of studying Chumash, I consider this double parsha to be one of the most fascinating. Hopefully by summarizing some of the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his fellow scholars, I have provided a path for others to see why this double parsha is one of my favorites and well worth exploring in depth.

Shabbat Shalom; Hodesh Tov,

Alan & Hannah

---

**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

---

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

---

### **Haftarat Shabbat Rosh Chodesh: All Who Mourn for Jerusalem**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \*  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

*Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftarah this week to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.*

This year, as Parshat Tazria-Metzora coincides with Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, and the weekly haftara gives way to the closing chapter of the Book of Isaiah, it is impossible to hear Yeshayahu's stirring words of consolation this season without feeling their weight.

Almost three years have passed since the horrors of October 7th. We have lived through war fought on multiple fronts – in Gaza and Lebanon, Syria and Iran. Homes destroyed across the north, south, and center of Israel. Families cycling through bomb shelters and reserve duty. Non-stop shiva calls. And, as this haftara falls just before Yom Hazikaron, military cemeteries that have grown far too large. Yeshayahu's vision of comfort is addressed precisely to this kind of grief – and it places a profound and demanding condition on that comfort.

The prophet paints a future of joy and renewal: Jerusalem rebuilt, her streets once again filled with laughter and light. *“Bring Jerusalem joy, exult in her, all of you who love her; celebrate her joy with her, all of you who mourned her”* (Isaiah 66:10). The Gemara (Taanit 30b) reads this verse with care and draws out a powerful principle: Only those who have genuinely mourned for Jerusalem will merit sharing in her future joy. The invitation to rejoice in redemption is conditional upon having grieved.

This teaching about who truly “mourns for Jerusalem” carries urgent contemporary weight. A Pew Research Center study released last month found that American favorability toward Israel has dropped eight percentage points in a single year, with 60% of Americans now holding an unfavorable view. More troubling is the trend within the Jewish community: just last year, 73% of American Jewish respondents held a favorable view of Israel. That figure has fallen to 64% – a decline of nearly ten points in twelve months. For those who love Zion, these are not merely political data points. They are a challenge to the very solidarity that Yeshayahu’s vision demands.

What lies behind this shift? Part of the answer is a well-funded, coordinated campaign to delegitimize the State of Israel and Zionism – visible in American higher education, in the media, and in political lobbying. This must be named and addressed.

But it would be a mistake to look only outward. We in Israel must honestly ask whether the policies and public statements of top Israeli officials have not made it easier to misrepresent Israel as a state unconcerned with minorities, insensitive to other faiths (including Jewish denominations which are not Orthodox), and willing to flatten Gaza and repopulate it with Jewish settlements. The obligation to protect the state is sacred; so too is the obligation to ensure that the vision of an independent, flourishing Jewish state remains one that Jews in Israel and the diaspora can embrace together.

*“As a man is consoled by his mother, just so shall I comfort you, and in Jerusalem, you shall be consoled”* (v. 13). Yeshayahu’s image of consolation is strikingly intimate – the warmth of a mother, the certainty of belonging. This comfort is not meant to be experienced alone. It is promised to a people that returns to Jerusalem together, whose grief has been communal and whose joy will be shared. Since October 7th, so many Jews worldwide have indeed mourned, prayed, donated, advocated, and made aliyah. That solidarity is real, and must not be taken for granted.

Generations ago, a visitor to the Kotel etched into its ancient stones a verse from this very haftara: *“You shall look on, your heart rejoicing, while your bones grow vigorous, like grass, and the hand of the Lord becomes known to His servants”* (v. 14). An anonymous hand carved those words of hope into the wall – a private prayer left for all who would come after. This person understood Yeshayahu’s meaning precisely: Our hope is not merely personal. The rejoicing, the vigorous renewal, the recognition of God’s hand in history – all of it belongs to all our people, as one.

**As we approach Yom Hazikaron, mourning our fallen with aching hearts, may we recommit to the work of shared solidarity that Yeshayahu demands. May we grieve together, hold one another, and confront with honesty and courage whatever stands between us and the vision of Jerusalem restored. And may we all merit, as a nation, and not merely as individuals, to see that day of consolation soon.** [emphasis added]

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact [ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org) or 212-935-8672. **Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-tzav-shabbat-hagadol-rabbi-brander-5786/>

---

## **Tazria: A Career of Mitzvos**

By Rabbi Label Lam \* © 5768

HASHEM spoke to Moshe saying, *“Speak to the Children of Israel saying, “When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male...On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised...”* (Vayikra 12:1)

It's hard to fathom! A brand new baby boy is born into a Jewish family and on the eighth day they are submitting the little fellow to a surgical procedure and then celebrating with a sumptuous meal. I'm waking early tomorrow just to participate in such an occasion. If I didn't know better, I'd think it was barbaric and cruel, but we know that the Jewish people are characterized by the Talmud as possessing the trait of mercy. Why then have loving parents from the time of Avraham, for 3600 years, gleefully introduced their infants to this operation?

Twenty-two years ago my wife gave birth to our oldest son on the Parshas Tazria, where we are commanded about circumcision. I was wondering then about the benefit of this action. Avraham was the pillar of kindness in the world. Although he may have been tested to do something that went against his natural tendency, there must also be some ultimate kindness involved or The Almighty would never prescribe it for all generations. What could be the reason? At my son's Bris ago I offered two approaches.

The Yeshiva was learning a Tractate of the Talmud known as Baba Metzia. At the risk of oversimplifying, it has to do with "lost and found." It analyzes thoroughly when possessions are considered to have exchanged ownership. There is a notion that if someone lost an object and someone else finds it, the finder can only take it for his own if it can be determined that the original owner has given up on it. For example, if a coin is found in the street, we can assume that the loser of that coin, when he discovers the hole in his pocket and that his generic coin is gone, he'll lose hope of ever recovering it. The coin is then considered available to the new owner. However, if one finds something with an identifiable mark or package or placement, then the owner is presumed to have not given up on it.

The same concept may be applied to the circumcision. HASHEM had commanded us to put an identifiable mark on every Jewish male. This informs us that even if a Jewish child goes lost from his heritage and is lost in the culture of the street, the owner never gives up. G-d does not lose hope. There is always a chance the child will find his way back home. This is a great gift for a Jewish child to have this stamp upon his flesh as a sign that he is always a Jew.

Another idea! Tractate Shabbos tells us of an unusual incident regarding King David. He found himself at the bath house and became shockingly aware that he has no Mitzvos around him. No Mezuzah on the bath house door, no Tefillin, no Tzitzis! He became anxious until he remembered that he has this permanent Mitzvah of circumcision and that somehow consoled him.

What bothered David? He understood that as with Jacob's dream of the ladder, angels were ascending and descending. None were parked. One is either going up or going down spiritually. There is no such thing as standing still. The Mishne in Pirke Avos tells us, "*Mitzvos bring about Mitzvos and violations cause more violations.*" In an environment without Mitzvos, David presumed he was sinking.

How does one break the momentum of a downward spiral? Where does the first Mitzvah come from that will lead him in the direction of even more Mitzvos? To find a light in a black out we need a light. To make money you need money. To get a job, you need to have had a job? How do we maneuver ourselves again and again in the direction of Mitzvos? King David came to appreciate at that moment the benefit of that permanent Mitzvah that has been installed on our flesh. With that, every Jewish male has been an invested with a Mitzvah in order to help him start when his heart awakens to **a career of Mitzvos.**

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5768-tazria/>

---

## **Tazria/Metzorah: Labels and Identity**

By Rabbi Dov Linzer \* © 2013

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

the woman who has had an irregular flow of blood.

The common denominator of all of these tumat is that they are the result of a state occurring to a person; they are not contracted from the outside. Whether the state is a skin disease, or some type of flow, it is something that is sourced in the person him or herself. The Gemara refers to these people as those who have *tumah yotzei mei'gufo*, the tumah emerges from their bodies. The tumah here is of less severity than the tumah of touching a corpse. Kohanim are prohibited from contracting corpse-impurity, and the purification from this impurity requires not just a mikveh, but the ashes of the Red Heifer. Nevertheless, although less severe in terms of its intensity, the tumah of this week's parasha is more severe in one important area: it directly defines the status of the person, and demands that such a person not enter into to the Levite camp, or after the wilderness period, the Temple Mount. A person with corpse-impurity, by contrast, can go up onto the Temple Mount.

What is the reason behind this greater severity? When tumah comes from the outside, even if it is very intense, it does not define the identity of the person to whom it transferred. A person who touched a corpse is just that – a person who touched a corpse. We do not have a proper noun for such a person – he is only described in terms of what he has done. In contrast, this week's parasha is filled with a cast of characters: the Metzora, the Zav, the Niddah, the Zavah. These people are defined by their status, since their status reflects their physical state of being – their flows, their skin, and so on. They themselves are the source of tumah, and this becomes their identity. Hence, they must keep even more distant from the Temple, where the primary concern is not just to keep tamei things out of its environs, but more specifically tamei people.

The difference between identity and essential character on the one hand, and traits, behaviors, and what the Greek philosophers would call "accidental characteristics" on the other hand, is one of great importance. We know that a key educational and parenting principle is to focus on the behavior, not the person. *"I know you are a good person, but what you did was wrong. The action was bad."* is a healthy parenting technique. *"Bad, bad, bad!"* yelled with a finger pointing to the child, is not. One reinforces the person's sense of herself as a good person, and calls on her to live up to that true, inner self. The other leads the child to see herself as bad, and to live up to, or rather down to, that identity.

While we know this principle when it comes to parenting, we often forget it when it comes to how we relate to those who are different than we. I still remember that until my children were about 10 years old and learned about the Civil Rights Movement in school and how our country had discriminated against blacks, they were blissfully unaware that people were categorized as black people and white people. If asked how our South African babysitter was different than we, they would have – and did! – respond that while we had light brown skin, she had dark brown skin. What a wonderful age of innocence! But it makes us wonder, why do we use skin color to categorize people, to define identity? We don't use eye color to do so.

We so often take a trait and decide to identify it with a person's very identity, very self. This can help us organize our reality, but it can also lead to blatant and subtle forms of generalization and discrimination. My children have special needs, but that doesn't define them. I do not want them to go through life as *"he is Apserger's"* or even *"he is autistic."* I want no one – and most of all not them – to forget that first and foremost they are special, unique, wonderful people, people who are so much more than any particular condition they may have. As my wife, Devorah Zlochower, and I wrote in an article on this topic, *"Most importantly, speak to our children and recognize them for the beautiful souls they are. Our children are poets, artists, philosophers and psychologists; their emotional and spiritual lives are deep and intense ones."* When people meet one of my sons, they need to see Kasriel or Netanel; if all they can see is "special needs" then they are not seeing them at all.

When we realize how easy it is for us to take a trait and turn it into an identity, and we then turn back to this week's parasha, we will discover that we have done the same to the people described therein. It is true that the Torah gives a proper name to the one with tzara'at – he is a metzora, but that case is the exception, and the name is ironically only given when he is in the process of leaving that state. However such labeling is clearly not the case when it comes to the other people mentioned in the parsha. The man with an irregular flow is ha-zav, which could be translated as *"the Flow-er,"* or *"the Emitter."* However, almost all translations do not take this approach, and understand that the word zav is not meant here as a name, but as a descriptor, and translate it as *"the man who has a flow."*

This insistence to describe, rather than label, is even clearer in the other cases. The man with the seminal emission is not,

as he is in Rabbinic literature, a ba'al keri, an ejaculant, he is rather one *asher teizei mimenu shikhvat zera*, "who has experienced a seminal emission" (Vayikra 15:16). The woman who menstruates is not a niddah, a flow-er or a menstruant. She is only called this in Rabbinic literature. In the Torah, however, she is a woman who is *bi'nidattah*, "experiencing her flow." (15:20). The woman with an irregular flow is not a zavah, as she is in Rabbinic literature, she is rather a woman who is "in her flow" (15:26, 28).

All of these people are described, not named. They are not disabled people, they are people with disabilities. This makes all the difference.

Because the tumah occurs to them directly, the own their tumah more, and they are more distanced from the Mikdash. And yet, the fullness of their identity does not have to be and should not be reduced to this status. This status may not even be a bad one: it is a natural occurrence, and in the case of the menstrual flow and the seminal emission, it is part of the human capacity to create new life. But who wants to be reduced to any status, even a neutral one?

As humans it is easier for us to assign labels and categorize. It helps us organize our reality more easily. This is why the Rabbis have given names to all of them, have given us this colorful cast of characters. They had halakha to discuss, and it would have been unwieldy to constantly be referring to "the man who has a flow," or "the woman who is in the midst of her menstruation," rather than just simply as "the zav," or "the niddah." And it is easier to conceptualize halakhic categories and rules in reference to people who are named, categorized, and assigned a particular identity.

This might be somewhat necessary in legal texts, but it is dangerous at the human level. When dealing with people, labeling is reductionist and it dehumanizing. **The Torah's careful use of descriptors rather than labels reminds us that we should think of these individuals as people, people with special conditions, people with disabilities, but not disabled people. These are states of being; they are not who the person is.** [emphasis added]

When we recognize the humanity and the irreducible nature of the person, we allow them to transcend any state or limitation. All these people can become tahor because we refuse to box them in and define them by these states. We recognize their humanity, their essence, their innate purity, and this allows them to undergo the process of *taharah*, of purification, that will allow them to regain this state of being. By never losing sight of the unique and irreducible *tzelem E-lohim* of the other, by refusing to reduce a person to certain states, characteristics, conditions or generalizations, we help protect that tzelem E-lohim and bring all of us one step closer to entering the Mikdash, and to living in a world in which we experience the Godliness of each individual.

Shabbat Shalom!

\* Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

From my archives

---

## Commemorating Yom HaShoah: Honoring the Kaliver Rebbe By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz \*

Dear Friends,

On this Yom Hashoah ve'Hagevura, I would like to share a brief reflection I wrote several years ago about a childhood hero who for me embodied the competing ethos of this sacred day: *Shoah* (devastating destruction) and *gevurah* (heroic perseverance).

This *Yom Hashoah ve'Hagevura* I am remembering the Kaliver Rebbe z"l, someone who embodied both, shoah and gevura. He experienced the horrors of the shoah as one of Dr. Mengele's experiments, but nonetheless managed to heroically triumph over those horrors.

Here is his story, in brief:

Long before there was Mordechai Ben David, Avraham Fried or Lipa Shmeltzer, renowned Chassidic music stars, there was the Kaliver Rebbe from Bnei Brak, *Rabbi Menachem Mendel Taub zichrono haKadosh livracha*, may his holy memory be a blessing.

He survived Nazi Germany with broken bones and a battered soul, but his spirit remained intact. In response to his spiritual triumph, he composed songs in Hebrew, Yiddish and Hungarian, which then became the soothing soundtrack for many of the second-generation Holocaust survivors. They were songs of hope and religious pride, which celebrated the triumph of faith over evil. The horrors of the Holocaust, paradoxically, deepened his faith, and strengthened his sense of duty and subservience.

As he explained it, that was the bargain he made with God: if You grant me the gift of life, I will dedicate that life to disseminating belief in You. The Rebbe held that God honored their bargain: he survived. In return, Rabbi Taub dedicated his life to sharing the faith which he salvaged from the ashes of Auschwitz. In his own way, he was somehow able to find divinity buried under the heaps of corpses strewn all over the death camps. His own survival, of course, did not make him oblivious to the profound loss: Millions perished and suffered grievously. His personal experience, however, was one of survival and spiritual triumph, which in turn buttressed his *emunah* and led to a direct, unalloyed *temimus*.

He embodied the pure 'Tam' of the Haggadah, standing in direct, spiritual opposition to Elie Wiesel's anti-'Tam'.

The Auschwitz crematorium deeply seared both their souls, but in drastically different ways. While Dr. Wiesel's soul became engulfed in a holy rage, it ignited a sacred passion in R. Taub's neshama.

Ultimately, both spent the aftermath of the Shoah trying to reconcile their faith with the horrors they experienced. Wiesel gave honor to God by abandoning Him (at least for a while); the Rebbe, on the other hand, honored God by spending the rest of his life forgiving Him, and also healing that which was broken, with song and melodious joy.

Zecher Tzadik Livracha!

His signature melody is the poignant "*Szól a kakas már*" (sol ah kokosh mar), a Hungarian-style tune he personally composed. The song's imagery is a powerful expression of Klal Yisroel's innate, impatient longing to return to Eretz Yisroel and rebuild: a magnificent, colorful bird, restless with yearning to fly home, yet constrained because the dawn of redemption has not fully broken. For me, this song is woven into the earliest memories of faith; I learned it as a small child, a tender nighttime lullaby sung by my Hungarian Bubby.

Below, it is translated into English. Here it is sung by the father-son duo, Chazanim Shimon and Chaim Farkas, (there may be ads in the YouTube link – please be patient).

The rooster is calling already  
It will be dawn soon  
In a green forest, on the flat fields  
A bird is walking.  
In a green forest, on the flat fields  
A bird is walking.

What kind of bird?

Legs are yellow, wings are blue  
It awaits me.  
Legs are yellow, wings are blue  
It awaits me.

Wait, bird, wait  
You must always wait  
If God ordered me for you

Then I'll be yours.  
If God ordered me for you  
Then I'll be yours

When shall it be?  
When shall it be?!  
"Yibaneh Hamikdash Ir Zion Temaleh" (When the temple will be rebuilt and Zion repopulated)  
Then it shall be.  
"Yibaneh Hamikdash Ir Zion Temaleh"  
Then it shall be.

Why does it not happen?  
Why does it not happen?  
"Umipnei Chataenu Galinu Meartzeinu" (We were exiled because our sins)"  
That's why it does not happen!

Due to Nazi cruelty, the Kaliver Rebbe left behind no descendants. If you're so inclined, saying some Tehillim or learning some Mishna le'ilu nishmato would be a great zechut for his seared but sacred soul.

Thank you,

[note: for a vort on Tazria-Metzora by the Kaliver Rebbe, see:  
<https://library.yctora.org/2026/04/the-courage-to-begin-again/> ]

Rabbi Ysoscher Katz

\* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY

---

## Thoughts for Yom Ha'Atsma'ut

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

At around the time that the State of Israel was being recognized by the United Nations, the Chief Rabbis of Israel wrote a letter in Arabic to the Arab world. The Sephardic Chief Rabbi Benzion Uziel, who was fluent in Arabic, likely wrote this letter that was signed by him and the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog.

Although so many years have passed since the formal establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the message of peace conveyed in this letter has largely been eclipsed by the ongoing hostilities and warfare.

Yom Ha'Atsma'ut, Israel Independence day, is observed this year on Wednesday night April 22 and Thursday April 23. It's worthwhile to review the words of Rabbis Uziel and Herzog, and pray that the message of peace will prevail...sooner rather than later.

### 21 Kislev, 5708 "A Call to the Leaders of Islam for Peace and Brotherhood."

To the Heads of The Islamic Religion in the Land of Israel and throughout the Arab lands near and far, Shalom U'Vracha:

Brothers, at this hour, as the Jewish people have returned to its land and state, per the word of God and the prophets in the Holy Scriptures, and in accordance with the decision of the United Nations, we approach you in peace and brotherhood, in the name of God's Torah and the Holy Scriptures, and we

say to you:

Please remember the peaceful and friendly relations that existed between us when we lived together in Arab lands and under Islamic Rulers during the Golden Age, when together we developed brilliant intellectual insights of wisdom and science for all of humanity's benefit. Please remember the sacred words of the prophet Malachi, who said: *"Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we break faith with one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?"* (Malachi 2:10).

We were brothers, and we shall once again be brothers, working together in cordial and neighborly relations in this Holy Land, so that we will build it and make it flourish, for the benefit of all of its inhabitants, without discrimination against anyone. We shall do so in faithful and calm collaboration, so that we may all merit God's blessing on His land, from which there shall radiate the light of peace to the entire world.

Signed,  
Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel  
Yitschak Isaac Ha-Levi Herzog

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

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.**

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/thoughts-yom-haatsmaut>

---

## Thoughts for Tazria-Metsora: Freedoms and Constraints

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

"Tazria" is from the root "zera," seed. It represents fertility, growth, development. On a broader level, it represents those forces in our lives that help us to be free and strong, that allow us to draw on our talents to be as creative and productive as we possibly can be.

"Metsora" includes the word "tsar," narrowness. It represents constriction and limitation. On a broader level, it represents those forces in our lives that stultify our freedom and strength, that restrict our movements and our thoughts.

We read two parashiyot this Shabbat, Tazria and Metsora. Perhaps the underlying message is that these two elements go together. Life is composed of ups and downs, growth spurts and plateaus, creativity and suppression. How wonderful it is to live in a free society that respects us for who we are. How excellent it is to be able to speak freely and honestly without fear of oppression. When we feel the power of "Tazria" we feel we can achieve much and give much to the world.

How very bitter it is to live under tyrannies where freedom of religion, speech and movement are curtailed, where one has to be afraid of being condemned and harmed. When we feel the power of "Metsora" we curl up into frightened silence.

But don't we, who are fortunate to live in free societies, also well understand the forces of "Metsora?" We can't board an airplane without going through security; we can't enter an office building without showing our i.d.s. When we buy food

products, they generally have safety labels to prove they have not been subjected to tampering. We learn, almost as a matter of fact, that we cannot trust human beings. There are people who want to murder us, blow up our airplanes, poison our food. Our lives are constricted by the fear of terror and violence.

We also are increasingly confronted with a "thought police" that seeks to control our freedom to think on our own. If we are not "politically correct," we are subjected to vilification. News reports are often slanted in order to curry favor with this or that power group. It takes intellectual clarity and moral courage to stand up against those who seek to constrain us.

Tazria reminds us of the power to renew and to increase the forces of good. Although Metsora is a fact of life, so is Tazria. Although there are those who promote the impurity of Metsora, there are also many who promote freedom and creativity, beauty and harmony. Life is an ongoing struggle between Tazria and Metsora. Let us be sure that we ourselves are identified with freedom, and hope, and purity.

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/thoughts-tazria-metsora-freedoms-and-constraints>

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.**

---

## A Dollar and a Dream

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine\*

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

When Moshe taught the details of the various afflictions related to Tzaraas, the people were scared. Moshe calmed them by saying, "*The afflictions are so that you will eat, drink, and be happy.*" These words are confusing; were they meant to be comforting? The afflictions include ostracizing a sinner and other painful situations. What exactly did Moshe mean when he said their purpose is to "eat, drink, and be happy?"

A few weeks ago, I was in the car with a friend who was driving. My friend was making wrong turns despite having a GPS system. Each time he missed a turn or turned onto the wrong street, the GPS would emit a jarring sound as the screen read: "Recalculating." After a few mistakes, the jarring sound of the GPS rebuke was getting on his nerves. I asked him if he wanted me to turn the volume down. He wisely responded, "No, that would be worse. Then I wouldn't even know that I made a mistake."

Negative feedback can be painful, but it serves a purpose. We appreciate it because it helps us get where we want to go. Similarly, Moshe was telling the people that the afflictions are not meant as punishments. They are meant to alert people that they are not on track. By providing an alert, Hashem enables us to redirect ourselves towards the goals of goodness. This is similar to a coach who may provide negative feedback but does so because he really believes in his charge. He is confident that with the right feedback the outcome will be a successful one.

A great example of this is the rumble strips which are often placed on the side of a highway. The rumble strips are there to awaken a drowsy driver who is veering out of his lane. The sound of the tires on the rumble strips is loud, ominous, and scary. But society views it as a gift because it alerts the driver that he is going off course. Rumble strips save lives.

Similarly, Moshe told the people that the afflictions he described are not meant as punishments. They are meant to save

lives and to help us live the most productive lives possible. The afflictions are described as warnings to help us get back on track.

The conversation between Moshe and the Jewish people isn't just about Tzaraas. It is a conversation that is equally applicable in any case of negative feedback. As the verse in Tehillim (73:1) states, "*Hashem does only good for the Jewish people, for those who are of pure heart.*" If one's heart is in the right place- focused on growth and excellence – then all communication is good. Either the communication confirms that we are on track or it offers us the feedback we need for correction.

I once read a memoir from a man who dreaded the day that his father would pass away. No one looks forward to that, but this man had a uniquely personal reason. Besides the fact that he loved his father, he dreaded the day that, as a mourner, he would have to lead the prayers. He knew that his Hebrew reading wasn't so good, and that he would be making many mistakes which would be most embarrassing.

Eventually his father passed away, and this man led the service, made mistakes, and was corrected. It bothered him, but he persevered. To his credit, he reframed the situation in a wonderful way. He began to give a dollar after the service to anyone who corrected him. He gave out the dollar bills with a smile and with genuine appreciation. "*Thanks for helping me get it right,*" he would say. With time his pronunciation improved, all the result of seeing the critique as an opportunity to help him reach a newfound dream for excellence.

Sometimes in observance we may notice laws that seem to be an imposition. On Shabbos, for example, a person might feel like they are "chafing at the bit," dreaming and craving all things forbidden on Shabbos. Interestingly, many of those prohibitions and Rabbinic, legislated to protect the sanctity of Shabbos. There are Jews who have therefore attempted to reject all Rabbinic law because the safeguards restrict things which would have been permitted according to Biblical law.

The reality is that these safeguards are not something to grumble about. Like rumble strips, they alert us if we are too close to danger. If we find ourselves running up against laws or safeguards/restrictions too often, we might just be too close to the edge. One who walks right up against a guardrail will bump into the guardrail and it might hurt. But it is a blessing. It is a warning and it is best to heed the warning. "*Move closer to a place of safe travel.*" "*When you move away from the fence it is easier to enjoy the garden.*" In fact, if you heed the warning, you can even come into the palace, where you can eat, drink, and be happy.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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

---

## Tazria-Metzora -- Natural Empathy

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \*

In his commentary on Parshas Metzora, Rabbeinu Bachye explains *tzara'as*, commonly translated as leprosy, to be a punishment for slander. He notes that the term used for one who has *tzara'as* – a *metzora* – is actually a contraction of the term **MoTZi sheim RA**, which means "*one who gives a bad name.*" He notes that the purification process for the *metzora* includes two birds, cedar wood and hyssop. Birds are symbols of voice and sound, and one who has misused his voice must therefore use birds as part of the process of correcting his flaw.

Rabbeinu Bachye explains that the cedar wood and hyssop also give an important message to the gossiper. However,

here he suddenly raises an additional flaw. He notes that cedar is of the tallest trees, while hyssop is of the smallest plants and says, “*What is the correction for this one who was haughty? Let him humble himself like hyssop and he will be atoned.*” While it can certainly be understood that one who is haughty would speak slanderously, there would seem to be many other reasons besides haughtiness for one person to speak ill of another. He may have previously harmed me in some way, or I may feel slighted by him. He may have done something which I find shocking or troubling, or it may just be juicy gossip. Why should we assume that anyone who speaks slander is guilty of haughtiness?

If we study the trait of haughtiness, there does appear to be a connection with slander. The *Mesillas Yescharim (Path of the Just)* explains in chapters 11 and 22 that the essence of haughtiness is the attitude that I am inherently special and deserving of praise. Humility is the exact opposite – an attitude that I am not more significant than anyone else and am undeserving of praise. Both a haughty person and a humble person may be aware of their strengths and of their flaws. The difference is in their perspective. The haughty person sees himself as being better than others overall and finds his flaws to be insignificant in the big picture. The humble person recognizes his flaws as being significant, and therefore does not consider himself to be better than others.

When we speak slanderously, we are focusing on another person’s flaws, saying that the other person is somehow less worthy because of those flaws. If I am aware of my own flaws, I will be much less likely to note someone else’s flaws. I wouldn’t want them to turn around and shine a spotlight on my own flaws.

This doesn’t fully answer the question, though. Being aware of my own flaws will not necessarily prevent me from ever speaking gossip. Perhaps someone may do something so outlandish that it is just juicy gossip. Or perhaps, someone will harm me in some way and I will simply want to get back at him by publicizing his flaws. We can still ask why Rabbeinu Bachye says that all slander requires arrogance.

I believe Rabbeinu Bachye is highlighting for us the beautiful yet delicate nature of the human soul. When I look at another human being and see his flaws, my natural instinct is to hide those flaws. I naturally empathize with him and understand how it feels to be flawed and to have those flaws noticed, because I recognize that I also have flaws. Though my flaws may be different, the emotion and the human experience is the same. I cannot help but sense how he would feel. Recognizing how he would feel, I would naturally refrain from slander.

The only reason why I wouldn’t empathize this way is if I somehow view myself as different than him. He has flaws, but I am not like him because I am perfect or at least my flaws are insignificant. Only if I believe that I could never relate to his experience, would I be able to be callous and speak against him. If I take a moment to stop and open my eyes to my own flaws, I instinctively recognize and empathize with his situation. I would empathize so strongly that I would be incapable of ignoring his pain and speaking against him.

G-d has gifted us with a noble spirit. Whenever I recognize another person’s situation, I feel his pain and care to protect him. I only need to open my eyes and see his reality. Empathy is imbedded in the human psyche.

\* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and then associated with the Savannah Kollel.

---

### **Tazria: Are Men Better?** By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \* © 2024

In the opening chapters of Genesis we read about the woman’s sin and her subsequent punishment. In the narrative which follows a woman’s submissive status, though at times better than the current one, is inferred from the relationship systems between biblical men and their wives and daughters and the legal discussion uses, as does Modern Hebrew, the masculine form as default. That being said, this week’s Parasha still has the distinct honor of being the first in which the Torah explicitly sets different standards for males and females:

*“When a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be unclean seven days....she shall remain in a state of blood purification thirty three days. If she bears a female, she shall be unclean two weeks...she shall remain in a state of blood purification for sixty six days” Lev. 12:2-5.*

The Midrashic and exegetical material dealing with this section revolves around three main concepts: women are inferior to men, the ways to guarantee male fetuses and the science of conception and gestation, but the salient feature of most commentaries is that they focus on the shorter period of impurity after the birth of a boy as a proof for male superiority, instead of considering the longer purity period after the birth of a girl as an opposite, or at least equalizing, argument.

The Talmud recommends that one should pray from the third day following conception through the fortieth that the fetus will be a male. A question was raised: we have learned that if a woman conceives first a male will be produced, but if the man conceives first it will be a female, and once the fetus' gender is determined it cannot be changed. The Talmud answers that it sometimes happens that both sides conceive simultaneously, in which case the gender is still pending until the fortieth day. B. Berakhot 60:1.

Nachmanides explains that the fetus is solely produced by the man's seed, and the woman's contribution is an injection of blood from the uterus into it. He mentions that according to Greek science the body is produced by the woman while the soul and the power of life are provided by the man. Both views consider the man superior and both will resurface in later Jewish literature.

The Midrash recommends the following actions as means to guarantee that one's children will be males and not (G-d forbid) females: abstain from relationships before the period; recite the Havdalah on wine; sanctify yourself during marital relationships. It makes me wonder whether all my very observant good friends who are fathers to girls only (Abou'l Bannat in Arabic) have failed on one, two, or all three. VaYikra Rabbah, Tazria, 14.

An interesting explanation to the longer impurity period mandated at the birth of a girl can be found in the writings of Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Sabba (1440-1508). He writes that women are aware that men control them, treat them as maid-servants, and are the only cause of their strife. Despite all that, women still love their husbands -- a love which according to R. Sabba is counterintuitive and can be understood only as stemming from the woman's curse in Genesis. A woman is willing to tolerate her suffering in order to become a mother, but as she experiences the terrible pain of birth pangs, she vows become celibate. Later on, however, when she sees her little bundle of joy, she regrets her vow of celibacy and wishes to return to her husband. Now if she had a boy, the joy is so great that she regrets within one week and thus declared pure on the eighth day, but if she had a girl it takes twice as long to regret. That is because the mother always prays for a boy and does not want a girl, as the maxim states: *“Three things are wanted by no one but necessary for all: a daughter among sons; tall stalks in the field; vinegar among the wine barrels.”* Each one of these is considered a bad omen. Vinegar is spoiled wine, tall stalks attract attention and can cause the evil eye to attack, and women brought curse to the world. This is the reason, says R. Sabba, that the waiting period is longer for girl. *Tzeror haMor*, Tazria and VaYetze

R. Yitzhak Karo (1458-1535) agrees with his colleague that the female is inferior. Her nature is cold and humid so she needs twice as much as a male to be formed and become a human being in the womb. This shows that according to the divine wisdom a female is worth only half a male, and for that reason he is the one obligated to study Torah. *Toledot Yitzhak*, VaYikra 12

Some of the men reading these lines might be gleefully smiling the *“I told you so”* smile, but others, and probably many women, will feel exasperated and frustrated to hear that this is what Judaism thinks of them. The Torah, though, has many facets, and there are commentators, such as Rabbi Moshe Shamah, who view the matter in a different light. (*Recalling the Covenant*, pp. 576-579). According to R. Shamah, the varying levels of cleanliness following the birth of a boy or a girl were meant to ease the concern of the multitudes that the newborn might be harmed by demons. The belief that a newborn and its mother are susceptible to demonic attacks can still be found among observant Jews today, although it does not date back to biblical times but rather to pagan Germanic superstitions, as Dr. Elisheva Baumgarten proves in her seminal work on Jewish family life in medieval Germany. (*Mothers and Children, Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe*, pp. 142-182).

The Torah, in our Parasha, placed restrictions on the mother, but not on the baby, to convey a message of protection and reassurance for the mother on one hand, but also a clear statement that the Torah does not believe in demons who can hurt the baby.

The reason for the different periods after a delivery of a boy or a girl is explained by R. Shamah as representing two aspects of the covenant, which is related to the number eight. A boy's circumcision on the eighth day marks his acceptance of the covenant, while for the girl the same effect is achieved by observing a purity period totaling eighty days.

This discussion is but the tip of the iceberg. There are many more sources in our Talmudic and rabbinic literature which do not treat women with a great deal of compassion and understanding, even when they rely on biblical sources which could be interpreted otherwise, probably because of culture and societal norms of the author's place and era. What then should be the response of rabbis, educators and lay leaders? Can one claim that it has always been like that or should we acknowledge national and global changes? Should we try, or is it even possible, to reconcile the traditional approach with the growing demand for equality inside and outside Judaism?

Rabbi David Bigman, Rosh Yeshiva of Maaleh HaGilboa, believes that instead of confronting disparaging or harmful statements head-on, educators should find subtler alternatives for those women who want to delve into Torah study. (*To Be a Jewish Woman*, Vol. 2, pp. 114-120.) I fear that this method at best postpones the crisis, but might even exacerbate it, since by channeling women's energies away from the problems we ignore them and cannot work towards a solution.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, the prolific author who in his short journey through this world has enriched us with immeasurable wisdom, wished to differ. In a small book published posthumously, he refers to the Genesis narrative and to the sin described in the second chapter. He explains that the first chapter of Genesis deals with God's world, which existed only in God's mind and which will reappear at the End of Days. We live in an imperfect world, the world of the second chapter, and our role is to perfect it. One of the main differences between the two chapters is that in the first one man and woman are created simultaneously and have an equal status, while in the second chapter the woman is created as an afterthought, to serve Adam and be his companion. Rabbi Kaplan therefore concludes, albeit very subtly, that the religious obligation to correct the discrimination against women is part and parcel of our duty to hasten the coming of Messiah. In his words:

*"The new awareness among women is merely a glimpse of the future Messianic Age"*  
(*Immortality, resurrection and the Age of the Universe*, p. 62.)

[Ed. note: since a baby boy's bris comes on the eighth day, and since the mother must be there to nurse the baby after the procedure, there is a practical necessity to cut short the period of tumah for the mother of a boy, ending it on the eighth day. This reason suggests that if not for requiring a bris on the eighth day, perhaps the period of tumah for the mother of a baby boy would also last for two weeks.]

**Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.**

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

---

## **A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community**

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz \*

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation \*\*

We are now in a sacred stretch of time marked by the Yomim, a period devoted to remembrance. It invites us to reflect on what was, to honor those who came before us, and to recognize what they sacrificed so that we might be here today. It is also a time to appreciate what we have, while acknowledging what we have lost.

This period falls during Sefirat Ha Omer, as we count from Pesach to Shavuot. The days leading up to Lag Ba Omer are marked by customs of mourning, reminding us of the loss of the students of Rabbi Akiva. We are taught that they died because they did not show proper respect for one another – a lesson that continues to echo across generations.

Ours is a tradition that remembers not only for the sake of sorrow, but for the purpose of growth. We recall the tragedies of previous generations so that we may build a better future. We remember the Holocaust to remain vigilant against the dangers of rising antisemitism. We honor the fallen soldiers of Israel to understand the profound value of having a homeland. And we celebrate Yom HaAtzmaut in recognition of those who made that dream a reality. Each act of remembrance carries both a message and a responsibility.

The purpose of memory is to guide us toward doing better. Especially during these days, we are called upon to increase love within our people, to strengthen our unity, and to treat one another with greater care and respect. At the same time, we must remain vigilant, ensuring that the tragedies of the past are never repeated. In this period in particular, we should make a conscious effort to add as much love as we can within our nation, while staying alert so that such atrocities never happen again.

B'ahavat Yisrael,

Rabbi Netanel

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

Message from the Shlichim at AHC: From Yom HaShoah that we had this week, through Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut and all the way to Yom Yerushalayim – this period is a summery of our story: remembering the things we have been through, thanking the ones who gave up everything for us and for our nation, celebrating the 78th birthday of our beloved State of Israel, and lastly – celebrating our holy city of Jerusalem.

From the Jewish community in New Zealand: We are sadly aware of further incidents of hate mail being sent to a small number of high profile members of the Jewish community. These have been reported and provided to the police and are being taken seriously.

\* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

\*\* Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

\*\* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter

Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

---

## **Rav Kook Torah**

### **Tazria: Rabbi Abba Arrives in Babylonia**

Babylonia did not become the center of world Jewry overnight. But a defining moment in the gradual relocation of Jewish leadership from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia may be pinpointed to a particular event: the arrival of Rabbi Abba Aricha on the shores of Babylonia in 219 CE.

Rabbi Abba was the preeminent scholar of his generation. He was known to all by the simple appellation “Rav” — the Rabbi. With Rav’s arrival and the establishment of his famed yeshiva in Sura, Babylonia emerged as the true center of Torah scholarship (see *Gittin* 6a, *Ketubot* 111a).

The Talmud in Shabbat 108a offers an intriguing account of this historic event. The great Babylonia scholar, Samuel of Nehardea, and his student Karna, were sitting by the banks of the Malka River. Suddenly they saw the river waters rising and becoming muddied. Samuel told his student Karna: “*A great man has arrived from the West [the Land of Israel]. He has a stomach ailment and the waters are rising in his honor. Go and test his wine.*”

Karna then greeted Rav and presented him with three questions:

How do we know that Tefillin (phylacteries) may only be written on parchment taken from a ritually-pure animal?

How do we know that blood is red?

How do we know which part of the body should be circumcised?

Rav successfully passed this unusual test. He then gave Karna a caustic “blessing”: “*May a horn (karna) sprout from your eye.*”

What is the meaning of this bizarre exchange?

#### **Uplifting, Yet Murky**

The waters in Babylonia did not rise just in Rav’s honor. This phenomenon was a sign of Babylonia’s rising fortunes and its emergence as the leading center of Torah learning.

At the same time, the waters were murky — a sign that this pivotal event was a source of profound sadness to the Jewish people. The scholar’s move to Babylonia was yet another indication of the decline of the Jewish community in the Land of Israel. Rav’s physical illness mirrored his inner pain and distress at the necessity to further deepen the exile of the Jewish people.

What was the meaning of the peculiar test that the Babylonian scholars set for Rav?

They realized that Rav was pained by the exile of Torah from Eretz Yisrael. And yet Rav was the very vehicle by which this was taking place! Rav’s life was the fulfillment of this great, yet bitter vision, a historic event both uplifting and disturbing, containing elements of national aspiration and collective suffering. Only a great soul could unite such terrible contradictions. Therefore Samuel commanded his disciple: Go test this scholar.

### Three Questions

All three of Karna's questions hinted at the centrality of the Land of Israel for the Jewish people. It is interesting to note that **it is precisely in the Talmudic sayings of the Babylonian scholars that we find statements praising the sanctity of the Land of Israel and the importance of living there. The ideology of the Babylonian rabbis was to negate and belittle the Diaspora, despite whatever advantages, material or spiritual, it held.** [emphasis added]

The first question posed to the scholar forced to leave Eretz Yisrael was like a stab to the heart. How do we know that Tefillin may only be written on parchment from a kosher animal? Parchment from other animals may be just as suitable for writing; but the holiness of the Tefillin cannot bind with impure material. So too, the holiness of the Torah cannot properly rest in a Jewish community residing in an impure land. Perhaps some great need forced Rav to leave Israel, but there should be no doubt as to the Holy Land's spiritual advantage over the impure land of exile.

What about Karna's second question — from where do we know that blood is red? This question was meant to evaluate Rav's love and dedication to the Land of Israel. Besides the Land's spiritual qualities and intrinsic holiness, one must also consider the nation's devotion to its homeland. These are ties of blood, built up over generations of self sacrifice, as the nation defended the land against enemies attempting to steal it. Blood is a metaphor of our natural connection to the land — deep, national ties which cannot be broken by deliberate calculations and rationalizations.

### Connected to the Physical

Karna's final question dealt with the mitzvah of brit milah. We find that the Torah speaks of removing the orlah of the heart (Deut. 10:16) and the orlah of the ears (Jer. 6:10). So where should circumcision be performed?

Rav replied that the Torah refers to the fruit of a tree's first three years as orlah (Lev. 19:23). Just as that orlah refers to that which produces fruit, so, too, circumcision is performed in a place that produces fruit.

This question also concerns our ties to the Land of Israel. One might think that brit milah is a spiritual undertaking, such as removing the heart's orlah to deepen one's ethical sensitivity, or removing the ear's orlah so it can hear and absorb elevated messages.

True spiritual growth, however, requires a foundation of brit milah in the physical flesh, influencing future generations — *"in a place producing fruit."*

So too, the special aspirations of the Jewish people are not only in the spheres of the abstract and metaphysical. They must be based on the physical realm — the Land of Israel. Our foundations of holiness must be connected to the material, just as the soul can only function in this world while bound to a physical body. Only after the brit is established in the physical realm is it possible to overcome other types of spiritual impediments, as we remove the orlah from our hearts and ears.

With regard to the heart and the ear, the Torah uses the word 'orlah.' But regarding trees, the Torah uses the same exact phrase as it uses with circumcision — orlah — "its orlah." This, Rav explained, is the full expression of orlah, referring to one's most basic level of obstruction to the spiritual and the holy.

### Two Types of Keren

At the end of this test, Rav had a sharp retort for his interviewer. 'Your name is Karna? Then may a horn (karna) sprout from your eye.' What did Rav mean by this?

The Hebrew word keren has two meanings. It may refer to a ray of light; or it may refer to the horn of an animal. Thus a keren can enable the eye to see, or conversely, it can blind it.

Rav rejected Karna's implied criticism that, by leaving the Land of Israel, he was weakening the connection of the Jewish people to their land. His true intention was to enlighten the Jews living in exile and elevate them with the Torah's holiness. Then they would be worthy of returning to the land of their fathers, to build it and be built through it with dignity and holiness.

By way of analogy, Rav noted that while a keren should be a source of light, it can also be a sharp horn, blinding instead of enlightening. So too, our love for the Land of Israel should be a source of inspiration and holiness. However, this love can be debased into greed for material gain and physical pleasure. Exile was necessary in order to elevate the nation's love for the land to a noble holiness. Then they will be ready for their national redemption, to leave the land of darkness to the place of light.

(Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. IV, pp. 277-279.)

[https://ravkooktorah.org/tazria\\_68](https://ravkooktorah.org/tazria_68)

---

## **Tazria, Metzora: The Plague of Evil Speech (5768, 5776, 5783)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi \*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moving to the modern age, one of the most brilliant exponents of Orthodoxy was R. Meir Loeb ben Yechiel Michal Malbim (1809-1879), Chief Rabbi of Rumania.[1] An outstanding scholar, whose commentary to Tanach is one of the glories of the

nineteenth century, he was at first welcomed by all groups in the Jewish community as a man of learning and religious integrity. Soon, however, the more 'enlightened' Jews discovered to their dismay that he was a vigorous traditionalist, and they began to incite the civil authorities against him. In posters and pamphlets they portrayed him as a benighted relic of the Middle Ages, a man opposed to progress and the spirit of the age.

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### FOOTNOTE:

1. After World War II, the country was officially renamed Romania, but as we are here discussing the country pre-1939, we are using the official name at the time: Rumania.

#### **AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:**

1. Why would tzara'at be a fitting punishment for lashon hara?
2. Why do you think people are often tempted to speak lashon hara, either about their leaders or about their peers?
3. How is language "God's greatest gift to humankind"? How can it be used for the good?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tazria/the-plague-of-evil-speech/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I normally select an earlier Devar. No other footnotes have been preserved for this Dvar Torah.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tazria/the-plague-of-evil-speech/>

---

### **Does It Matter Which Words Rashi Quotes?**

By Yossi Ives \*

In 1965, the Rebbe introduced a novel way of understanding Rashi's commentary to the Torah through a series of principles and tools. Over the years, they were augmented and applied across hundreds of studies on Rashi. An exemplar of this approach is the Rebbe's treatment of what appears to be the simplest of comments from Rashi on the first verse of the Parshah of Metzora.

The metzora is sometimes translated as a "leper," although for the most part the spiritual affliction of tzaraat bears no resemblance to leprosy. It is a group of conditions — involving mostly reddening or whitening — that appear on a person's body, clothes or home. The Torah delineates a complex set of rules to determine if a person is a metzora,<sup>1</sup> and the consequences of a positive diagnosis are serious: the metzora is ritually impure and must be quarantined until the symptoms are declared to be lifted.<sup>2</sup> Then, the metzora must bring an offering consisting of two small birds, a strand of scarlet wool, a piece of cedarwood and a bunch of hyssop stalks.

This is how the offering is described in the opening verse of the portion of Metzora:

*"This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification; let him be brought to the kohen."*<sup>3</sup>

Rashi cites the words *"This shall be the law of"* and comments: *"This — the fact that the Torah says 'on the day of his purification' — teaches us that we do not purify [the metzora] by night."*

Evidently, Rashi feels that the words he cited from the verse justify a new rule that restricts the purification to the daytime. Now, the words upon which Rashi bases his comment, *"This shall be the law of,"* do not seem to indicate any preference for day or night. So how does that teach us this new rule?

Of course, the following words are *"on the day of his purification,"* which do use the word "day" in relation to the metzora's purification and which could presumably tell us something about the timing of the purification. Indeed, the original source for this ruling is the Midrash called Torat Kohanim,<sup>4</sup> which does cite *"on the day of his purification"* as the proof text.

Why does Rashi not do the same? Instead, Rashi quotes words from the verse that do not seem to prove anything, while omitting the words that appear to validate his comment!

The Rebbe's unique approach to Rashi involves stepping back and re-examining basic assumptions. Through a shift in understanding, the problem melts away.

Why, the Rebbe asks, do we assume that day means daytime? When we say "day," do we always mean during the hours that the sun shines? If I say, "Every day, I spend half an hour studying," does that preclude me from doing so after sundown? Of course not. Likewise, *in the Torah*, "day" often simply refers to a single 24-hour period. We need to look no further than the opening sentences of the Torah: "It was evening and it was morning, day one."<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the words "day one" include both the evening and the morning.

In fact, the word "day" is so fluid that the Torah uses it when describing events that took place entirely at night: "On the day I smote the Egyptian firstborns in the Land of Egypt"<sup>6</sup> refers to an event that the Torah tells us happened at the stroke of midnight. So it turns out that "day" does not necessarily mean daytime.

Now we have a major problem: If "day" can also mean "night," how does Rashi know that the word "day" in our verse is teaching us that the purification must be by day and not by night?

That, explains the Rebbe, is why Rashi did not cite the words "on the day of his purification" as his proof-text, because they prove nothing. It could say "day" and mean "night." Instead, Rashi deliberately cites the words preceding that, "This shall be the law of," because surprisingly this does teach us that the word "day" is exact and means only during daytime.

How so?

Read again the opening words of the Parshah, "This shall be the law of the metzora," and ask yourself why those words are even needed, given that the previous 59 verses discuss nothing but the laws of the metzora. The Torah could just as well have omitted those words entirely and begun with the words, "On the day of his purification, he shall bring ..."

We must conclude that those seemingly redundant words are there for a reason. But what?

Rashi supplies the answer: The opening words, "This shall be the law of the metzora," are there to teach us how to interpret the next words, "on the day of his purification" — literally during the daytime.

How do we know this? Because all the words in the opening phrase imply exactitude.

Let us examine each one in turn. "This" implies a degree of precision. If I tell you to "do it this way" or to go in "this direction," I am excluding another way or direction. The next words, "shall be," also suggest specificity. If I say, "this is how things shall be," you know this means a clear preference for a particular course of action. The words "the law of" imply rigidity and definition. If the words "on the day of his purification" are preceded by three phrases that all imply exactitude, it follows that "day" is to be read literally. So it turns out that the words Rashi cites from the text are in fact the basis for his comment.

There is a moral lesson here for us: The "day of purification" is preceded by "This is the law of." What can this teach us? That **when one seeks purity and holiness, the sole path to achieving this goal is through studying Torah** ("the law"). Living as we do in a material reality, we are subject to impurity. Torah study lifts us out of the mundane and elevates us to a world of holiness and purity. [emphasis added]

Adapted from Likkutei Sichot vol. 12, Metzora (pg. 78-82.)

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 13.

2. Leviticus 13:46.
3. Leviticus 14:1.
4. Leviticus 14:1.
5. Genesis 1:5.
6. Numbers 3:13.

\* Rabbi of Cong. Ahavas Yisrael of Pomona, N.Y.; also founder and Chief Executive of Tag International Development, a charitable organization that focuses on sharing Israeli expertise with developing countries.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5095623/jewish/Does-It-Matter-Which-Words-Rashi-Quotes.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5095623/jewish/Does-It-Matter-Which-Words-Rashi-Quotes.htm)

---

## **Tazria/Metzora: When Not to be Subjective**

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

*The first symptom of tzara'at of the skin is a white spot on the flesh, and is examined by a priest. If the priest examines it, and the snow-white spot does not contain white hair, and it is not any lower than the skin, and it is dark, the priest must quarantine him for seven days. (Lev. 13:26)*

We are taught that a priest whose eyesight is impaired is disqualified from examining or judging cases of tzara'at. From the perspective of Kabbalah, an impairment of eyesight indicates that the full power of sight has not been sufficiently limited, i.e., reduced and adjusted to the physical limitations of our world. The priest whose eyesight is impaired thus "sees" the spiritual dimension of reality more than he sees its physical dimension.

Since he principally sees the inner essence of the person he is examining, and our inner essence is intrinsically good, he cannot see the person's faults (which are manifest as the tzara'at on his skin) at all. He is thus disqualified both from deciding whether the person does indeed possess such a fault and, later on, whether the person is cured of it.

Similarly, while we are always instructed to see only the good, inner essence of others (and of ourselves), when we are called upon to help others (or ourselves) overcome some spiritual shortcoming, we need to focus our vision objectively, evaluating the situation in its own context in order to be of genuine assistance.

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom* Vol. 3

\* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* 3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society  
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

---

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to [AfisherADS@Yahoo.com](mailto:AfisherADS@Yahoo.com). The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 32, Issue 26

Shabbat Parashat Tazria-Metzora

5786 B”H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l

### Holiness and Childbirth

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

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

Rambam explains: We have already shown that, in accordance with the Divine wisdom, genesis can only take place through destruction, and without the destruction of the individual members of the species, the species themselves would not exist permanently... He who thinks that he can have flesh and bones without being subject to any external influence, or any of the accidents of matter, unconsciously wishes to reconcile two opposites, namely, to be at the same time subject and not subject to change. Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, III:12

Throughout history there have been two distinct and opposing ways of relating to this fact: hedonism (living for physical pleasure) and asceticism (relinquishing physical pleasure). The former worships the physical while denying the spiritual, the latter enthrones the spiritual at the cost of the physical.

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

The laws with which the Parsha begins are striking examples of this: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be *teme’ah* for seven days, just as she is during the time of separation when she has her period... Then, for thirty-three additional days she shall have a waiting period during which

her blood is ritually clean. Until this purification period is complete, she shall not touch anything holy and shall not enter the Sanctuary.

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

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

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

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

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

Freud coined the word *thanatos* to describe the death-directed character of human life. Judaism is a protest against death-centred cultures. “It is not the dead who praise the

Lord, nor those who go down into silence” (Psalm 114) “What profit is there in my death, if I go down into the pit? Can the dust acknowledge You? Can it proclaim your truth?” (Psalm 30). As we open a Sefer Torah we say: “All of you who hold fast to the Lord your God are alive today” (Deut 4:4). The Torah is a tree of life. God is the God of life. As Moses put it in two memorable words: “Choose life” (Deut. 30:19).

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

This is how Judah Halevi explains the purity laws: A dead body represents the highest degree of loss of life, and a leprous limb is as if it were dead. It is the same with the loss of seed, because it had been endowed with living power, capable of engendering a human being. Its loss therefore forms a contrast to the living and breathing. The Kuzari, II:80

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

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

Clearly the Torah intends a message here, and it is unmistakable. To be a Jew is to know that survival is not a matter of biology alone. What

To sponsor an issue of Likutei Divrei Torah:  
Call Saadia Greenberg 301-649-7350  
or email: [sgreenberg@jhu.edu](mailto:sgreenberg@jhu.edu)  
<http://torah.saadia.info>

other cultures may take as natural is for us a miracle. Every Jewish child is a gift of God. No faith has taken children more seriously or devoted more of its efforts to raising the next generation. Childbirth is wondrous. To be a parent is the closest any of us come to God himself. That, incidentally, is why women are closer to God than men, because they, unlike men, know what it is to bring new life out of themselves, as God brings life out of himself. The idea is beautifully captured in the verse in which, leaving Eden, Adam turns to his wife and calls her Chava "for she is the mother of all life."

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

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

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

---

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

#### **Humans Must Perfect Themselves**

"And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." (Leviticus 12:3) As

mentioned in the previous chapter, the commandment of circumcision in the portion of Tazria appears right in the middle of the discussion of the impure and pure periods immediately following childbirth. Furthermore, our sages specifically derive from this ordinance that the ritual of circumcision overrides the Sabbath: "On the eighth day, [the child's] foreskin shall be circumcised – even if it falls on the Sabbath." (Shabbat 132a)

Why express this crucial significance of circumcision – it takes precedence even over the Sabbath – within the context of ritual impurity? Is there a connection?

Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel links the two issues by interpreting:

"And on the eighth day, when [she] is permitted [to have sexual relations with her husband], on that [day] is [the baby] to be circumcised."

He is thereby citing the view of our sages in the Talmud, who understand that the circumcision must be on the eighth day following the birth "so that everyone not be happy while the parents will be sad" if they cannot properly express their affection toward one another (Nidda 31b).

It seems to me that there is a more profound connection. When a woman is in a state of ritual impurity, she and her husband are forbidden from engaging in sexual relations until she immerses in a mikveh (ritual pool of rain or spring water). Obviously, this restriction demands a great deal of self-control and inner discipline. The major symbol which graphically expresses the importance of mastering one's physical instincts is the command of circumcision: even the sexual organ itself, the physical manifestation of the male potency and the unbridled id, must be tempered and sanctified by the stamp of the divine.

A well-known midrash takes this even one step farther: "Turnus Rufus the Wicked once asked Rabbi Akiva: 'Whose works are better, the works of God or the works of human beings?' He answered him, 'The works of human beings...' [Turnus Rufus] said to him, 'why do you circumcise?' [Rabbi Akiva] said, 'I knew you were asking about that, and therefore I anticipated [the question] and told you that the works of human beings are better.' Turnus Rufus said to him: 'But if God wants men to be circumcised, why does He not see to it that male babies are born already circumcised?' Rabbi Akiva said to him '...It is because the Holy One Blessed be He only gave the commandments to Israel so that we may be

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

purified through them.'" (Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria, 5)

Rabbi Yitzhak Arama, in his commentary Akedat Yitzhak, explains this to mean that there are no specific advantages or necessary rationalizations for doing the commandments; they are merely the will of God, and we must see that as being more than sufficient for justifying our performance of them.

It seems to me, however, that the words of the midrash as well as the context of the commandment reveal a very different message. The human being is part of the physical creation of the world, a world which is subject to scientific rules of health and illness, life and death. The most obvious and tragic expression of our physicality is that, in line with all creatures of the universe, we humans as well are doomed to be born, disintegrate and die. And therefore, the most radical example of ritual impurity is a human corpse, *avi avot hatuma*. However, an animal carcass, a dead reptile, and the blood of the menstrual cycle (fall-out of the failed potential of fertilization) likewise cause ritual impurity. A woman in childbirth has a very close brush with death – both in terms of her own mortality as well as during the painful anguished period preceding the moment when she hears the cry of a healthy, living baby.

God's gift to the human being created in the divine image, however, is that in addition to physicality there is also spirituality, in addition to death there is also life eternal, in addition to ritual impurity (*tuma*) there is also ritual purity (*tahara*). Hence, the very human life which emerges from the mother's womb brings in its wake not only the brush with death, *tuma*, but also the hope of new life *tahara* – and while the *tuma* is for seven days, the *tahara* is for thirty-three! The human being has the power to overcome his physical impediments and imperfections, to ennoble and sanctify his animal drives and instincts, to perfect human nature and redeem an imperfect world.

This was the message which Rabbi Akiva attempted to convey to Turnus Rufus the Wicked. Yes, the world created by the Almighty is beautiful and magnificent, but it is also imperfect and incomplete. God has given the task of completion and redemption to the human being, who has the ability and capacity to circumcise himself, to sublimate his "sub-gartelian" (beneath the gartel, or belt) drives, to sanctify society and to complete the cosmos. Indeed, the works of the human being are greater! And the command of circumcision belongs within the context of impurity and purity.

And this is also what our sages were trying to convey when they taught that circumcision

overrides the Sabbath. The Sabbath testifies to God's creation of the world – impressive but imperfect, awesome but awful, terrific but tragic. Circumcision testifies to the human being's challenge to redeem himself and perfect the world. Indeed, circumcision overrides the Sabbath.

---

**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**“Something Like a Blemish has Appeared on My House” – Why State it Like That?**

In Parshas Metzora [Vayikra 14:34], the Torah introduces the laws of tzara'as ha'bayis [“tzara'as of the House”], which applies “when you come to the Land of Canaan that I am giving you as an inheritance.” These halachos are known as “Nigei Batim.” Tzara'as can appear on a person's body, it can appear on garments, or it can appear on the walls of one's house.

The blemishes that appear on the walls of one's house are the “first stage” of tzara'as contamination. Chazal say that tzara'as is not merely a physical ailment. It has a physical manifestation, but it is in fact a spiritual disease. Consequently, it is not to be translated as “leprosy,” which is a totally physical ailment. This is a spiritual ailment which causes physical symptoms. In many places, Chazal say that tzara'as comes as a punishment for something a person is doing wrong (for example Eruchin 15b). It is a message from the Ribono shel Olam.

Chazal say that the first time the Ribono shel Olam sends the message, He has Mercy and puts the tzara'as on a person's house (further removed from a person than his body or his clothing). If the person does not get the message, then the Ribono shel Olam sends the message “a little closer to home” and the person finds the message on his garments. If he still does not get the message, his very body is afflicted with the terrible disease of Tzara'as.

The person who finds such blemishes on his walls goes to the Kohen and tells him “something that looks like a blemish (k'negah) has appeared on my house.” Rashi (alluding to a Mishna we will quote in a moment) inquires why the testimony of the homeowner is given in the form of “something that looks like a blemish” (k'negah). Why not make a definitive statement: I have a blemish on the walls of my house? Rashi comments: “Even a Torah scholar who knows for sure that it is a negah should not rule definitively that it is in fact Tzara'as, but rather should use the tentative form, “it appears to me as something like a negah on my home.”

This is based on a Mishna in Tractate Negaim [12:5]. Even a Talmid Chochom who knows the laws of tzara'as thoroughly, and has no doubt whatsoever that the blemish on his walls

is House Tzara'as, may not say those words. Rather, he goes to the Kohen [Priest] and says “K'negah nir'ah li ba'bayis” — something like a blemish appears to me to be on my house.

Why is this so? Normally, a bona fide Torah scholar may pasken his own shaylos. Why can't the Talmid Chochim rule in this case? The Tosfos Yom Tov on the Mishnayos in Tractate Negaim [12:5] quotes four reasons why a person should not definitively say, “A negah has appeared on my house.”

Number One: The Tosfos Yom Tov cites Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi (in the name of his teachers), who says that this is an example of the Rabbinic saying, “Teach your mouth to utter the expression, ‘I don't know.’” Chazal instruct us that we need to develop habits that will keep us from becoming too confident that we are always right. Even if someone is 99% sure that he does know something for a fact, the Rabbis urge him: “Don't be so sure of yourself!”

Number Two: The Tosfos Yom Tov himself explains that this is a matter of Derech Eretz [appropriate etiquette] of how a person should interact with the Kohen. The homeowner may be a Talmid Chochom. He may know the law. But the halacha is that it is not up to him to pasken such a shaylah. When it comes to tzara'as ha'bayis, only the Kohen can rule that the house is tameh or tahor. It is a simple matter of courtesy that no one should go to the Kohen and tell him presumptuously, “It's a nega!” Protocol is that the Kohen will tell you whether it is a nega or not! That is his jurisdiction. Derech Eretz l'Kohen.

Number Three: The Tosfos Yom Tov also gives a practical reason for a Talmid Chochom homeowner to be tentative in his initial meeting with the Kohen. If he says to the Kohen definitively, “I have a nega in my house” this may influence the Kohen's ruling. You might intimidate him — because of your reputation as a scholar and Talmid Chochom — to automatically go along with whatever you say, thus forfeiting the possibility that he may justifiably determine that the blemish on the house is not Tzara'as. It is better to be tentative and say “k'negah (a blemish-like appearance) has shown up on my house,” rather than paint the Kohen into a corner, such that he has no choice but to declare your house under quarantine as Tameh.

Number Four: Finally, the Tosfos Yom Tov suggests that the issue at hand reflects the principle, “Do not open your mouth (to give suggestions) to the Satan.” The Talmud advises us not to say things which the Satan may turn into a reality. If you say, “I have a tzara'as blemish in my house,” the Satan can give you what you ask for, so to speak, and the

## Likutei Divrei Torah

blemish on your walls will be found to be tzara'as.

After presenting these four reasons, the Tosfos Yom Tov asks a basic question: Why is this concept only found by nigei batim [House blemishes]? Why doesn't the halacha teach that if he has a tzara'as sign on his clothes he should go to the Kohen and say, “A nega-like appearance has shown up on my garment!”? We do not have any such halacha. Likewise, if a person has tzara'as on his arm, we never find that the appropriate protocol is to tell the Kohen, “Something like a nega has appeared on my body!”

The Tosfos Yom Tov feels this is such a strong question, that in fact he concedes the premise of the question. Although the Torah only says this halacha by House Tzara'as, indeed the same procedure should be followed by anyone struck with either Garment Tzara'as or Body Tzara'as as well. (He admits that this is not how the halacha is codified in the Rambam, and he gives a lengthy explanation to deal with that issue.)

Let's assume, however, that the Tosfos Yom Tov's novel answer is not correct, and that this requirement is only necessary in the case of House Tzara'as. The question remains: Why is that so?

The Tolner Rebbe raises this question. Furthermore, the Tolner Rebbe broadens the question: If someone has a ritual question involving a mixture of milk and meat food substances (for example, someone stuck a fleishege spoon into a milchege soup), have we ever heard that proper protocol is to go to the Rov and tell him, “Maybe I have a shayla of basar b'chalav [ritual question involving meat and milk]? If someone has a chicken with a broken bone and is not sure if the bone broke before shechita [ritual slaughtering] (and the animal is therefore non-Kosher) or the bone broke after shechita (and the shechita was thus done on a healthy animal, and it is Kosher), has anyone ever questioned the propriety of the shochet's making a definite statement: “I have a problematic broken bone in the chicken I just slaughtered”? Of course not!

The questioner can make a definitive statement to the Rabbi about the non-Kosher status of the item he is questioning. If the Rov believes the questioner is in error, he will tell him he made a mistake. We are not concerned with matters of protocol, or “don't open your mouth to Satan,” and the like. In no other area of halachic inquiry does the questioner need to couch his question in tentative terms like “k'negah nir'ah li ba'bayis” — something like a blemish appears to me to be on my house.

The Tolner Rebbe explains the matter as follows: Negaim are a message from the Ribono shel Olam. When you have a “nega” on your walls, the Almighty is trying to tell you that something is wrong with your house. He is not merely trying to tell you that there is something wrong with your physical domain. “Bayis,” in Jewish lore, is the place where one raises his children, where he educates his family. When someone finds a “nega” in his “Bayis,” the Almighty is telling him that something is wrong with the way he is raising his children. Nigei Batim are about the institution of the Jewish home (Bayis).

The Bayis is the basic building block of the Jewish Nation, as we find in Egypt: “...They should take for themselves every man a lamb for his father’s household, a lamb for each Bayis.” [Shemos 12:3] A blemish on the Bayis means you are building defective building blocks for the Jewish nation. Something is wrong with the chinuch [education] going on in this house. The defect may be in one of four areas:

Do not say “a negah has definitively appeared in my house” because you should teach your tongue to utter the expression “I don’t know.” Don’t be so sure of yourself! Don’t let your children get the impression that you know all the answers. That is not good chinuch. As much as it is necessary to portray oneself as the head of the household, it is not embarrassing for a person to say I don’t know or at least I am not sure. When your child asks you a question in hashkafa for which you don’t know the answer, do not say “We don’t ask such questions.” Don’t tell him “That’s a silly question.” Under those circumstances, you should tell your child “I don’t know.” This is an example of a “k’nega nir’ah li ba’bayis” attitude.

The second thing that may be wrong with your chinuch is the way you treat people that are not as chashuv [important] as you. You are a distinguished Torah scholar. You wrote a sefer on the Laws of Tzara’as. You know the intricacies of the law backwards and forwards. Now you have a blemish on your walls. Your next-door neighbor is a Kohen who is an ignoramus. He does not know the difference between terumah and ma’aser. He knows nothing! “I must go to such an ignorant priest and ask him a question — does this qualify as a nega or not?” Outrageous! What does he know? But, the Mishna insists this is what he must say: “Something like a nega has appeared on the walls of my house.” A person needs to show derech ertz to everyone. The greatest scholar has no right to lord it over anybody. Teach your children that just because you may be wealthier or smarter or have more illustrious ancestry, that does not exempt you from showing common courtesy and manners towards your humbler neighbors and acquaintances.

The third reason the Tosfos Yom gave is that if you say definitively “a nega has appeared on my walls,” you may unduly influence the Kohen. Some people, by virtue of their personal charisma, are overwhelming personalities. There is an expression regarding such people, “He takes all the oxygen out of the room.” This is as if to say “There is no room to breathe after this guy opens his mouth.” Imagine such a homeowner telling the Kohen, “There is a nega in my house.” The Kohen says to himself “Am I going to argue with him?” It is great to have influence and it is great to have charisma, but it stifles a person’s children’s own independence of thought. This too can negatively impact the chinuch in the home. The father’s overpowering personality does not give his children a chance to develop into who they really are, on their own.

The fourth reason why a person must say “k’nega nir’ah li ba’bayis” is so that he does not “open his mouth to the Satan.” A person who has such a negative view of life that everything looks black, and everything is no good, cannot positively influence his children. A person who has the pervasive attitude, “I know nothing; I am a rag; I can’t do anything right, etc.” also provides poor chinuch. Without at least portraying a modicum of self-confidence, he spreads a contagious inferiority complex to his offspring. They also grow up thinking of themselves as “nothings.” A person is not supposed to consider himself a “nothing.”

The Chassidic Rebbeim teach that this is why man has two pockets (on either side of his pants). In one pocket, he must keep a slip of paper with the pasuk, “I am dust and ashes.” [Bereshis 18:27]; in the other pocket, he must keep a slip of paper with the pasuk, “For my sake the world was created” [Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5]. This is teaching that each person must achieve an appropriate balance between haughtiness and humility. Too much haughtiness is no good; but if a person is too modest about himself and thinks of himself as a shmateh [rag] and acts like a shmateh — this is also improper, and will provide an improper role model to his children.

This is why this unique halacha of “k’negah nir’eh li ba’Bayis” is only mentioned in connection with blemishes in the Bayis (Nigei Batim). This is a lesson about the type of Bayis that every Jew is supposed to have. Regarding all other areas — niddah, nevelah, basar b’cholov, hilchos Pessach, hilchos Shabbos, and so on — there is no such halacha that a person needs to enquire of the posek with such tentative questions. Only where we are talking about correcting a flaw in the Jewish Bayis (such as education of children that begins within the family unit, Bayis), only here do we have the pedagogic requirement to tentatively approach the Kohen with the statement,

## Likutei Divrei Torah

“Something like a blemish has appeared on the walls of my house.”

---

### OU Dvar Torah

#### The Narcissistic Metzora

##### Rabbi Steven Dansky

The Torah’s discussion of the Metzora, often translated as a leper, is one of the most perplexing sections of the Torah for modern readers. A person who develops a mark on their skin is declared impure and must live in isolation, separated from the community and publicly announcing their impurity. Rabbinic tradition explains that this affliction, known as Tzara’at, is a punishment for lashon hara— speaking negatively about others. Yet several aspects of the Metzora’s purification process raise questions about this explanation. In particular, the Metzora must bring both a Chatat and an Asham offering, even though the sin associated with Tzara’at appears to be clearly identified.

This essay argues that while lashon hara is traditionally associated with Tzara’at, it may not be the root cause of the affliction. Drawing on the interpretation of the medieval commentator Isaac Abarbanel, I will suggest that the deeper spiritual problem underlying Tzara’at is arrogance or narcissism. Harmful speech is therefore not the primary sin but rather a symptom of an inflated sense of self. By examining the symbolism of the Metzora’s purification ritual, the story of Naaman in Book of Kings, and the episode of Miriam in Book of Numbers, we can see that arrogance often lies beneath the act of lashon hara. From this perspective, the rituals of the Metzora are designed not merely to correct speech, but to humble a person who has elevated themselves above others.

The Sacrifice of the Metzora - When it comes to the purification of the Metzora, allowing him or her back to the confines of the Mishkan, there is a requirement to bring two sacrifices: One of them is a Chata’at and one of them is an Asham.

The Abarbanel explains of the Asham sacrifice that he brings: Because the sin of the Metzora is known to him that he did unwittingly he brings a Chatat, and if it is unclear to him if he sinned or not, he needs to bring an Asham, because the purpose of this sacrifice is that it is “hanging” -i.e. If he did indeed sin, he would need to bring the sacrifice.

This is quite puzzling. The correlation between Tzara’at and Lashon Hara has been clearly lineated for us in the Torah. Why should the Metzora then need to bring a sacrifice which indicates that he didn’t know what his sin was in the first place?

The Abarbanel’s view of the Metzora

There is a very specific process which the Metzora has to undergo to achieve purity, allowing him back into his home and connection with other people. Amongst the materials that he needs is wood from a cedar tree and hyssop. The Abarbanel explains as follows:

Our sages have explained that Tzaraat occurs as a result of pride and arrogance, as it says in the book of days (II, 23) concerning King Uzia. Because the Metzora believed himself to be so important...he thought of himself as important and tall as the height of cedars, he brought a piece of cedar wood His cure is to lower himself like the hyssop which is the lowliest of weeds.

The Metzora has a narcissistic personality. He believes himself above and more important than anyone else, like the cedar is taller than any other. It is this overweening arrogance which caused his illness. A perfect example of this is the narrative of Naaman related in the book of Kings.

Tzara'at in the Prophets - The narrative of Naaman is found in the second book of Kings, Chapter 5. There it states: (1) Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was an important man to his lord and high in his favor, for through him GOD had granted victory to Aram. But the man, though a great warrior, was a leper. (2) Once, when the Arameans were out raiding, they carried off a young girl from the land of Israel, and she became an attendant to Naaman's wife. (3) She said to her mistress, "I wish Master could come before the prophet in Samaria; he would cure him of his leprosy." ....

Naaman is clearly an important person, well known, and famed because of his valour of arms.

When Naaman appears in front of Elisha, he does not do so on his own. He comes with a retinue with his "horses and chariots". The Abarbanel here explains that he does so in order to impress Elisha, and in this way Elisha would try harder to cure him of his affliction.

Elisha seems unimpressed by this wealth and grandeur. He sends a messenger who tells Naaman that if he wishes to be cured, all he needs to do is immerse himself in the river Jordan seven times.

Naaman's response is one of fury. The narrative states: Naaman was angered and walked away. "I thought," he said, "he would surely come out to me, and would stand and invoke the LORD his God by name, and would wave his hand toward the spot, and cure the affected part.

What has put Naaman out to the extent that he walked away from Elisha? Abarbanel explains that Naaman believed that because he was known to be an important person, Elisha should have come out of his tent to greet him personally. Instead, Elisha sent a servant to deal with Naaman. Furthermore, he believed that Elisha should have stood in front of him the whole time, as commoners would stand in front of a king or ruler. Elisha does nothing of the sort.

It is understandable that Naaman thought that he deserved to be treated with the highest respect. Why then, did Elisha not respect him in this way? There is a law that one should stand in front of a king, because of the honour which is afforded to kings. While Naaman was not a king, he was certainly a person of serious importance. Why did Elisha not come to deal with him personally? Why did he not give him the honour due to a man of serious power?

A closer look at the story can provide us with an answer to this question. G-d had made Naaman the hero of Aram, because it was he that shot Ahab (the king of Israel) according to the Abarbanel and won the war against Israel. Naaman takes this victory as a personal victory as his victory, boosting his ego, making him arrogant. His arrogance is further expressed through his anger that Elisha does not meet him personally, instead sending a messenger. Elisha, knowing that the source of Naaman's Tzaraat is his arrogance, does not go out to meet him, or personally attend to him, because he knows that doing that action will just serve to inflate Naaman's already inflated sense of self. His actions serve as a personification of the hyssop, the lowest of the trees. It is only when Naaman listens to his servants, who convince him to immerse himself in the Jordan river does the process of recovery begin. Once he is cured, Naaman says: Returning with his entire retinue to the agent of God, he stood before him and exclaimed, "Now I know that there is no God in the whole world except in Israel! So please accept a gift from your servant."

Naaman admits that he is not in control, but rather it is G-d. His arrogance is lifted, and he is once again healthy.

Other Rationales for Tzaraat - While the reasoning of the Abarbanel works very well when it comes to Naaman. However it flies in the face of normative thinking around this spiritual disease.

Rashi at the beginning of Parashat Metzora, quoting the Talmud in Arachin (16b) says that a person contracted Tzara'at because her or she spoke badly about their fellow (lashon hara). It is for this reason that he would bring 2 live birds to the Kohen as part of his purification

## Likutei Divrei Torah

process - the birds twitter constantly, like people talking unguardedly to one another.

This interpretation is one which has been widely accepted, and finds support later on in the Torah when Miriam receives Tzaraat. Prior to this we are told: (1) Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married: "He married a Cushite!" (2) They said, "Has GOD spoken only through Moses—and not through us as well?" GOD heard it (Numbers 12 1-2).

It is clear therefore that the Torah attributes speaking badly about others to be the source of Tzara'at.

Abarbanel's view fits neatly into the narrative of Naaman. However, it would seem that he has forgotten about Miriam, who spoke badly about Moshe. Why not choose a more obvious source to prove the spiritual cause of the disease?

A Closer Look at Miriam - If we look more closely at the Miriam narrative, we can get a better picture and understanding of the Abarbanel's view. Miriam speaks to Aharon about Moshe's marriage to a Kushite woman. She says

He married a Cushite!" (2) They said, "Has GOD spoken only through Moses—and not through us as well and GOD hears" (Numbers 12 1-2).

The Abarbanel explains their complaint: In my opinion Moshe separated from his wife Tzipora. They claimed that perhaps he separated from her because he needed to be prepared for prophecy at all times. Because Moshe was by nature the most humble of all men, and had little need for intimate relations, he would not want to be close to his wife. Miriam complained about the disgrace that Moshe brought on his wife...if he separated from her for the needs of prophecy, that would not be necessary, because both Aharon and Miriam were prophets, and they still hear G-d's voice.

G-d's response comes immediately: (6) "Hear these My words: When prophets of GOD arise among you, I make Myself known to them in a vision, I speak with them in a dream. (7) Not so with My servant Moses; he is trusted throughout My household. (8) Mouth to mouth I speak to him, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds G-d's likeness, and why are you not afraid to speak about my servant Moshe?"

G-d's response to Aharon and Miriam is that Moshe is qualitatively different from them. He has a far more intense prophecy than they are able to appreciate, and therefore the laws which apply to Moshe do not apply to them.

One could easily argue that the reason that Miriam spoke badly about Moshe was because she believed herself to be exactly the same as the greatest of the prophets. That was hubris, and that hubris is the source of the reason that she felt the need to complain to Aharon. The lashon hara that she spoke had its roots in arrogance, and it is for that arrogance Miriam is stricken with Tzar'at.

The Narcissistic Metzora - Perhaps now we can come to a clearer understanding of why a Metzora would need to bring an Asham offering. A narcissistic personality might not have the ability to see his or her own narcissism. When one believes one is correct, and that one is superior to others in all ways, it is difficult to see a fault in oneself. The Torah gently rebukes Metzora by asking him to bring an Asham offering, suggesting that perhaps they made a mistake of which they were not aware. Perhaps they are not as perfect as they believe themselves to be. The Metzora cannot acknowledge it, so the Torah gives them a method of acknowledging that perhaps they had acted in an incorrect manner. That hint would give them an inkling that perhaps they do have faults, and those faults need to be remedied.

---

#### **Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash Nature and Brit Mila**

##### **Sicha of Harav Yehuda Amital, z"l**

"And God spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the children of Israel saying, if a woman conceives and bears a male child she shall be impure for seven days; as in the days of her menstrual impurity shall she be impure. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And for thirty-three days she shall continue in the blood of her purifying; she shall touch no holy thing nor shall she come into the Temple until the days of her purifying are completed." [Vayikra 12:1-4]

The mention of the mitzva of brit mila (circumcision) here, sandwiched in between the laws pertaining to the purity of a woman who has given birth, is surprising and seems out of place.

Of course, we may explain that the Torah is simply presenting a chronological description of events - the seven days of impurity immediately after the birth, followed on the eighth day by the brit mila, and then the days of purifying.

It is also possible that the mitzva is mentioned here because of its importance. After all, this was the first mitzva which God explicitly commanded Avraham Avinu, and it is in fact the first mitzva given to the Jewish People as a whole.

But there is yet a deeper significance to this mitzva. Midrash Tanchuma (Tazria, 5) recounts: "Once the evil [Roman governor] Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva, 'Whose deeds are greater - God's or man's?' He replied, 'Man's deeds are greater.' Turnus Rufus asked him, 'Is man then capable of creating heaven and earth, or anything like them?' Rabbi Akiva replied, 'I was not referring to the sphere beyond man's ability, over which he has no control. I refer to those creations of which man is capable.' He then asked, 'Why do you circumcise yourselves?' Rabbi Akiva replied, 'I knew that that was the point of your question, and therefore I answered in the first place that man's deeds are greater than God's.' Rabbi Akiva brought him grains of wheat and some bread, and said: 'These grains of wheat are God's handiwork, and the bread is the handiwork of man. Is the latter not greater than the former?' Turnus Rufus answered him, 'If God wanted you to perform circumcision, why did He not create the child already circumcised while still in the womb?' Rabbi Akiva answered, 'Why do you not ask the same question concerning the umbilical cord, which remains attached to him and which his mother must cut? In response to your question - the reason why he does not emerge already circumcised is because God gave Israel the commandments in order that they would be purified by performing them. Therefore David wrote, 'Every word of God is pure (or, purified).'"

The debate recorded here is a serious and fundamental one that exists between Israel and the nations. The nations of the world see nature as being worthy of admiration. Nature, according to their perception, is the most perfect creation, and man is incapable of attaining anything greater. Their philosophy - to which many still adhere today - holds that man should grow and develop naturally, should be part of nature, should eat only natural foods, and that his 'naturalness' should know no bounds, because everything natural is automatically beautiful and good.

The Torah has a different approach. As Rabbi Akiva taught, nature is not perfect. It contains poisonous substances and includes dangerous beasts. The beauty and perfection of nature are limited, and man must recognize its limitations within the sphere of his natural behavior.

Hence man's obligation to elevate and perfect nature - for example by means of the mitzva of mila - inculcates in his heart the idea that he is a partner of God in creating the world and bringing it to its ultimate perfection, and serves as our response to the nations of the world. (Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat Parashat Tazria 5753. Translated by Kaeren Fish.)

---

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

##### **Aish.Com: Rabbi Avraham Twerski's Insights on the Torah**

If a person (adam) will have on his skin . . . a tzaraas affliction (Vayikra, 13:2). The Talmud is very clear that the affliction of tzaraas (the exact nature of which is unknown to us) is a punishment for having spoken lashon hara, derogatory speech.

The Hebrew word the Torah uses for "person" in the above verse is adam. There are several other Hebrew words for "person": enosh, ish, gever. The ethical writings state that each refers to a level of spirituality, and adam represents the highest level. We must understand, therefore, the Torah's choice of the word adam for a person afflicted with tzaraas.

The Chafetz Chaim said that the juxtaposition of this portion of the Torah to that of the previous portion dealing with non-kosher animals is to teach us that people who may be meticulously careful about what goes into their mouths should be equally as scrupulous about what comes out of their mouths. There are sins which a Torah observant person would never do, but as for lashon hara, it is a rare person who is saved from it (Bava Basra 164b). Hence, even a spiritual person, adam, is vulnerable to lashon hara.

The Midrash relates that a peddler went through the streets shouting, "Who wishes to buy an elixir of life?" R' Yannai, who was engrossed in his Torah study, asked to see his wares. The peddler said to him, "For you I have nothing." Upon R' Yannai's insistence, the peddler took out a Book of Psalms and showed him the verse, "Who is the person who desires life and loves days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech" (Psalms 34:13-14). R' Yannai then said, "All my life I have been reciting this psalm, but I never understood it until this peddler pointed it out to me" (Vayikra Rabbah 16:2).

This Midrash has puzzled many Torah scholars. What was in these verses that he had never grasped previously? The words of the psalm could not be any clearer: Guarding one's tongue from lashon hara is conducive to long life.

Perhaps we may understand this by examining the Talmudic statement that the remedy for lashon hara is the study of Torah (Arachin 15b). A number of commentaries ask, In what way is Torah study a penance for lashon hara? The Jewish law is that if you have offended someone, it is essential that you make amends to that person and ask his forgiveness. They answer that it is not the study of Torah per se that constitutes penance. Rather, the study of Torah will enable a person to understand the gravity of lashon hara so that he will do what is necessary for penance.

The gravity of lashon hara can be seen in the episode of Joseph and his brothers, which was brought about by his speaking derogatorily about them (Genesis 37:2), and in what happened to the prophetess, Miriam, when she spoke improperly regarding Moses (Numbers 12:1-10). To this very day, we are suffering the consequences of the lashon hara delivered by the spies to Moses (ibid. 13:31-32). This should make one cognizant of how far-reaching the effects of lashon hara can be, and how diligent one must be to do proper teshuvah.

While the mitzvah of studying Torah is extraordinarily great (Shabbos 127a), the Talmud points out that Torah can be a double-edged sword. "If one merits, Torah can be an elixir of life; if one is not virtuous, Torah can be a deadly poison" (Yoma 72b). How penetrating these words are! If used improperly, Torah can be destructive.

The impact of derogatory speech depends on the character of the speaker. If a person who has little credibility makes a negative comment about someone, people are likely to dismiss it as worthless babble. However, if the speaker is a person of stature, a scholar whose opinion carries some weight, the attitude towards his words is, "If he says so, it must be true. He knows what he is talking about." The more learned a person is and the higher he is held in esteem, the more his words are taken seriously.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that every human character trait can be put to good use. But what about vanity? This is so abominable a trait that it repels the Divine Presence (Arachin 15b). How can vanity ever have a positive application?

We can see, however, that even vanity can have a redeeming feature. Before making a negative comment about someone, do not be humble and think of yourself as an insignificant person whose words will not be heeded. This is the time when vanity can temporarily be put to good use. "I must be careful of what I say. People are not likely to dismiss my words lightly. I am an important person, and my words can have a great impact."

The greater a Torah scholar a person is, the more he must be careful of his speech. The words of an esteemed Torah scholar will be taken seriously. If he speaks negatively about someone, he has allowed his Torah scholarship to become a negative force. The Midrash says that lashon hara destroys three people: the speaker, the listener and the one about whom it is spoken (Devarim Rabbah 5:10). If Torah scholarship gives credibility to one's lashon hara, it indeed becomes "a deadly poison."

The man who was peddling the "elixir of life" was not an unlearned person. He was trying to teach people mussar, personal growth. He did not believe that a great Torah scholar like R' Yannai was in need of his teaching. When he told R' Yannai that his teaching about lashon hara was not relevant for Torah scholars, R' Yannai remarked, "I was unaware that people had this mistaken impression. To the contrary, it is those who are Torah scholars who have great need for this elixir of life, because Torah has value only if one is virtuous. Negligence on the part of a Torah scholar, particularly in speaking lashon hara, can seriously distort the value of Torah."

We can be spared from lashon hara if we incorporate the second half of the verse, "loves days that he may see good." In his introductory morning prayer, R' Elimelech of Lizhensk says, "Help us to see the good in our fellows, and not their defects."

If we concentrate on looking for the good in people, we will have no need to make negative comments about anyone.



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io  
From: Chaim Shulman <cshulman@gmail.com>  
& Allen Klein <allen.klein@gmail.com>

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON TAZRIA METZORA - 5786

[parsha@groups.io](mailto:parsha@groups.io) / [www.parsha.net](http://www.parsha.net) - in our 31th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to [parsha+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:parsha+subscribe@groups.io) Please also copy me at [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com) A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net> It is also fully searchable.

Sponsored in memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yecheil Zaydel Dov

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact [cshulman@gmail.com](mailto:cshulman@gmail.com)  
(proceeds to tzedaka)

REMEMBER to count the Omer – **Friday night will be 16 days** which is 2 weeks and 2 days of the Omer

### Table of Contents:

- Haircuts on Erev Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Iyar – R' Yaakov Skoczylas
- Metzora & Responsibility of Speech – Rav Soloveitchik – summarized by R' Nisson E. Shulman
- Shalom Zachar: Hodaah/Protection/Forgotten Torah – C.O. Shulman
- Parties, Ballgames & Movies During Sefirah – R' Aryeh Lebowitz
- Classes of Tum'ah – Rav Hershel Schachter on
- Lesson of House Tzaraas: Nothing Is Your Stuff – R' Yissocher Frand
- Forgetting to Light Shabbat Candles – R' Chaim Jachter

### Kollel Lihora'ah (Yerushalayim)

**"Ask the Rav" — Parshas Tazria Metzora 5786**

**Harav Yaakov Skoczylas Shlita**

**Haircuts on Erev Shabbos Kodesh When It Falls on Rosh Chodesh Iyar**

Q: What is the practical halachah when Erev Shabbos coincides with Rosh Chodesh Iyar—may one shave or get a haircut?

A: The commonly accepted ruling among many leading halachic authorities is that when Rosh Chodesh Iyar falls on Erev Shabbos, even though some are careful to follow the directive of Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid not to take a haircut on any Rosh Chodesh—even when it falls on Erev Shabbos—nevertheless, the practical ruling is to permit haircuts even for those who are stringent in following that directive. This is because, due to the customs of Sefiras HaOmer, one was unable to get a haircut beforehand. To explain: The Mishnah Berurah (siman 493:5) and Kaf HaChaim bring down in the name of the great Achronim that it is permitted to take a haircut on Erev Shabbos in honor of Shabbos when it is also Rosh Chodesh. The reason is that there is an added element of joy—both Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh—and therefore one may take a haircut in honor of both. However, according to the directive of Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid, as brought in the Mishnah Berurah (siman 260:7), one should not shave or take a haircut on Rosh Chodesh. As it states there, some places have the custom not to cut hair or nails on Rosh Chodesh even when it falls on Erev Shabbos, because such was the instruction of Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid. According to this custom, one should be stringent

when Rosh Chodesh Iyar falls on Friday. Nevertheless, in Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim, vol. 6, end of siman 36), Rav Moshe Feinstein writes that when Rosh Chodesh Iyar falls on Erev Shabbos, haircuts are not prohibited on account of Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid's directive, since one was unable to cut hair earlier due to his established custom. This is also the ruling of Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l, as cited in the responsa Yisa Yosef (vol. 4, siman 118). Additionally, in Kovetz MiBeis Levi (p. 341), the view of the author of Shevet HaLevi zt"l is brought: if Rosh Chodesh Iyar falls on Friday, those who follow Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid's directive may take a haircut earlier—on Thursday after midday. He cites Kaf HaChaim (siman 493:47), who brings other Acharonim and leniencies in this matter. Therefore, some halachic authorities permit beginning haircuts even on Thursday night after sunset, and one who is lenient in this has authorities to rely upon.

### וזאת תהיה תורת המצורה

**"Who Wants Life?" — The Metzora and the Responsibility of Speech**  
**Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik**

**Summarized by Rabbi Nisson E. Shulman**

The Midrash says,

הה"ד מי האיש החפץ חיים: מעשה ברוכל אחד שהיה מחזיר בעיירות והיה מכריז ואומר 'מאן בעי למזבן סמא דחיי'. רב ינאי הוה יתיב, שמעיה דמכריז; אמר ליה, 'תא סק להכא'. סלק לגביה. אופיק ליה ספר תהלים, הראה לו הפסוק, 'מי האיש החפץ חיים נצור לשונך מרע סור מרע ועשה טוב'."

"This is the Torah of the *Metzora*. That refers to "Who is the man who wants life?" A certain *rochel* (peddler) was passing through villages and crying out, 'Who wants to buy an elixir of life!' Rabbi Yanai was sitting there, heard his announcement, and said, 'Come here'. The *rochel* approached, and opened the *Sefer Tehilim*, and showed him the passage, 'Who is the man who wants life; let him guard his tongue from speaking evil, turn from evil and do good.'"

That was the "medicine for life" that the peddler was selling. *Amar Rav Yanai, af Shlomo machriz, Shlomo Hamelech* also announced the same thing, *Shomer piv uleshono shomer mitzaros nafsho. Amar Rav Yanai, Kol yamai hayisi kore hapasuk haze*, "My whole life I used to read this *pasuk, velo hayisi yodea heichan peshuto*, "I didn't understand the *pshat*". *Ba rochel ze vehodieni* "until this *rochel* explained it to me" with his advertising a medicine for life. With what did he explain it? With the *pasuk* in *Tehilim, Mi haish hehafetz hayim, netzor leshoncha mera, sur mera vase tov...* The Midrash continues *Lefichach Moshe hizhir es Yisrael, 'Zos tihye toras hametzora - motzi shem ra*.

This is the Midrash. And usually when a Midrash is found in the Gemarah, the text of the Midrash is much longer and expounded with greater detail than the text as it appears in the Gemarah. That is logical, since Midrash was composed of *derashot*, and the *derashot* were recited Shabbat for the congregation, so it was given in a longer form. So it is with this episode of the peddler and Rav Yanai, presented so dramatically in the Midrash, and given in the Gemarah (Avoda Zara 19b) in abbreviated form. *Machriz Rav Alexandri* – apparently the peddler was Rav Alexandri – *Man baei hayai, man baei hayai' – kanif veasu kula alma legabai. Amri lei, Hav lan hayai. Amar lehu, Mi haish hehafetz hayim, netzor leshoncha mera, sur mera vase tov. Veshema tomar, (Natarti leshoni mera usefasai midaber mirma), elech veisgare besheina, talmud lomar Sur mera vease tov*. "Who wants life, who wants life?" He gathered a large gathering around him. They said to him, "Give us life!" He said to them, "Who is the man who wants life, let him guard his tongue from evil, turn from evil and do good. And lest you should think, I shall [guard my tongue] by going to sleep? We learn, 'Turn from evil and do good.'"

It is the same story, though the end is remarkable. This *ma'amar* of the *rochel* is very popular among *darshanim, lomdim, and hachmei hamusar*. First of all, what had the *rochel* achieved? What kind of a lesson had he taught? And the *rochel* was not a simple Jew! He was Rav Alexandri!

Second, why was Rav Yanai so impressed with the brilliance and the insight of the *rochel*?

Third, what was the point of Rav Yanai who quoted Shlomo's statement, *Shomer piv uleshono, shomer mizaros nafsho*, claiming that his whole life he did not understand this *pasuk* until the *rochel* came and taught it to him? What is the difficulty in this *pasuk*? Everyone knows that guarding your tongue saves you a great deal of trouble!

And further, what does the Gemarah conclude? *Zos tihyeh toras hametzora, toras hamotzi shem ra*. What has it to do with the *rochel*?

Furthermore, what does the Gemarah mean by *Shema tomar elech veesgare beshena* – who forces him to sleep? And what would the sleep accomplish?

Apparently it was a rule by laid down by *Chaza"l* that *negaim* come as a punishment for *lashon hara*. This is apparent from the Gemara in Avoda Zara, from the Midrash Rabbah, and other places. And the Rambam, at the end of *Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas*, dedicates a long *halakhah* to this concept that *negaim* come as a punishment for *lashon hara*. The Rambam speaks about this very sharply. Apparently *Chaza"l* held it to be a fundamental principle.

Why not another illness?

It is very logical. *Negaim* are different from other illnesses in one important way. In other illnesses, the first symptoms are often very serious and you know that the person afflicted is very sick. Whether he has great pain, fever, convulsions, the first symptoms are a clear indication that the person is seriously ill. *Negaim* appear at first in a very mild and innocuous fashion. *Kenega nir'e li...* It is hardly noticeable, and the person doesn't know that he is sick at all. Only the kohen, the expert, the dermatologist, knows what is a benign *nega* and what is the kind of *nega* that will eventually destroy the entire human body. One has to be a very great expert to be able to discern the difference between a serious *nega* and a simple pimple or discoloration, to decide whether the person is to be rendered *tame* or *tahor*.

*Lashon hara* is the same way. With other sins, people can recognize the magnitude of the violation; whether it is terrible, disgusting, immoral, etc. But the early symptoms of *lashon hara* are almost unnoticeable. Just a few spoken words, indicating something very innocuous about the person who is the subject of *lashon hara*: hardly significant! *Kenega nire li babayit*. It looks like nothing, not worth remarking upon. Have I stolen from him? Hurt him physically? Done him monetary damage? But the expert *kohen*, knows: *Vetime hakohen*. The consequences of *lashon hara* are indescribable. That is why *negaim baim al lashon hara*.

I have, however, a serious question. If the Almighty punished with *tzaraat*, it means that the man spoke *lashon hara*. If he did not speak *lashon hara*, there cannot be defilement through *tzaraat*. After all, (as we noted), our sages have established this as a fundamental principle.

Yet we find a story told in *Iyov* (Job) *Ish haya be'erezt Uz, Iyov shemo. Vehaya haish hahu tam veyashar, viyerei Elokim, vesar mera*. This gives *Iyov* a great tribute, that he was *tam, veyashar, vesar mera*. We cannot say that *Iyov* was all these things, and that he spoke *lashon hara*! If he had spoken *lashon hara* he would not have been a *tam veyashar vesar mera*! And the *pasuk* in *Yekezekel* cites *Iyov* as an example of perfection - *Im yaamdu shalosh anashim haele, Noach, Iyov veDaniel!* *Iyov* is therefore the example of a *tzadik*! And yet, in the book of *Iyov* it is written "*Vayetze haSatan meet penei Hashem, vayach et Iyov bishchin ra mikav raglo ad kaddado!* *Iyov* was smitten from head to toe with vile boils". He became a *metzora*! *Vayikach keli cheres lehisgared bo vehu yoshev besoch haefer*; "He took a shard with which to scratch himself, while sitting in ashes. So *Iyov* was afflicted with *tzaraas* even though he did not engage in *lashon hara*! How can that be? Is the Ribono shel Olam *ase Torato plaster*? Did *Chaza"l* has *vehalila* make a mistake? That is impossible! And what shall we do with *Iyov*, and what the Tanach says of him – *Ish tam, veyashar, viyerei Elokim*? Certainly with that testimonial he did not engage in *lashon hara*?

Actually, this can be explained as follows. *Lashon Hara* is a result. Every sin has a root source, a reason that a person commits that sin. We would be better off saying *viduy*, not for the sin itself, but for the reason for the sin.

There are two reasons, or sources for the sin of *Lashon hara*. One is when a man is a misanthrope and hates other people. The world is full of people who cannot see anything good in their fellow human beings. Such a person is *einav raah beshel acherim*, not because of competition, or some hurt sustained in a fight or argument, or because he has been offended in some other way. He actually has no connection or relationship with the person who is the object of his *lashon hara*. That person never did any evil towards him. But he cannot stand it to hear another person being praised. He can't stand it to hear that a person is handsome, capable, a *lamdan*, clever in business. The moment he hears someone praising another, his natural reaction is *eyin hara*, to tear that person down, speak *lashon hara*, and show that he is worthless. That *lashon hara* comes from *ayin hara*, because that person himself is *ra: einav tzara beshel acherim*. It comes from *rish'ut*. That is the first category of *lashon hara*.

There is also a second category of *lashon hara*. This class of *lashon hara* doesn't have its source in cruel, jealous, or evil tendencies, in *eyin hara*. There are people who are perfect in their own way: *frum*, good, involved in learning. Whatever they do is correct, even perfect. But they have no interest in others: neither in the *kelal*, nor in any other individual. "I am *frum*. That is good enough."

For example: When *Yeshayahu* came to *Hizkiyahu Hamelech* and said, *Ubanecha yihyu sarisim lemelech Bavel, Hizkiyahu* responded, *Ach beyamay lo sihiye haraa hazos*. "As long as my own eyes will not see this, I don't care about the children". Such people are very strict upon themselves. They do nothing wrong. They do not sin. But for the *asid*, the future, they do not care. I know many such people today who have no care about their children. You can't say they aren't true and good Jews. They are. But they are possessed with a kind of split personality. For themselves they are *medakdek bemitzvah kalah kevahamura*. But when it comes to their children they can even overlook *hilul Shabbat!* And there are others who do care for their children, but do not care for the children of others. They do not care about others receiving a true Torah *hinuch*. They don't care about building *Yeshivos*. They are *sur mera*, but they are not *ase tov!* For these are two distinct levels. There is a level of *sur mera*, and there is a higher level of *ase tov*.

The Torah testifies that Noach was an *ish tzadik, tamim haya bedorosav*. In connection with Avraham, however, the word *tzadik* is missing. The Torah tells us that to Avraham Hashem says, *Heye tamim vehithalech lefanay*. It doesn't say that the Ribono shel Olam said to him "You are a *tamim*". It states that He commanded Avraham to become a *tamim*. Apparently the Ribono Shel Olam felt that Avraham still lacked something of *temimut*. *Hishalech lefanay veheye tamim*. But by Noach the Torah states, in the indicative case, *Noach ish tzaddik, tamim*:. It is a fact, not a demand! It appears that the Ribono Shel Olam spoke of Noach in higher, more praiseworthy terms than of Avraham! Nevertheless, with Avraham Hashem concluded a Covenant, and whenever Hashem wants to comfort Jews, it says, *Vezecharti es brisi Avraham*. In Shmone Esre the words *Elokey Avraham, Elokey Yitzchok and Elokey Yaakov* are included, while all Noach's descendants are *bnai Noach* and there is no *bris* comparable to what you find with Avraham (notwithstanding the *keshes baanan*), and you do not find *vezacharti es brit Noach* in the Torah. Nor do you find *Elokey Noach* either. Why?

It is because of one thing. Noach was indeed a *tzadik* and a *tamim*. He was a *sur mera*. As far as he himself was concerned, Noach did no evil. He was perfect, without blemish. But he lacked the *ase tov*. The Midrash says, in *Vezos Haberacha*, that when Noach comes to Avraham and Moshe, and says *Ani gadol mimchem*, I am greater than you, Moshe and Avraham answered, *Mashal lishtei sefinot shehayu mehalchos bayam*, Two ships at sea; One captain saved himself but not his vessel. The other saved himself and his vessel as well. *Mi gadol mimi?*

The lesson of that Midrash is that Noach was not an *ase tov*. The Zohar states it clearly. If the Ribono Shel Olam would have told Moshe or Avraham, *Ase lecha tevas atzey Gofer ki hineni mevi mabul al haaretz*

*leshaches kol basar, ki oscha raisi tzadik bador haze*, would Avraham and Moshe have gone meekly into the Ark? They would not! Moshe would have cried out, *Mecheni na misifrecha asher katavta!* Either all are saved or none are saved! You know how Avraham pleaded for Sedom. Noach heard *Ki otcha raisi tzadik bador haze*, a smicha from the Ribono Shel Olam, and liked the passage very much. And he went right into the Ark.

This is what the Ribono Shel Olam said to Avraham. Avraham! I don't want you to be a *tamim* like Noach, an *ish tzadik tamim haya bedorosav*. I want your *temimus* to be different. *Hishalech lefanai*. Learn the lessons of Hashem and teach them. Go over the entire world. Teach them to know Hashem. *Vayikra beshem Hashem, Vayita eishel biBeer Sheva, Vayiven sham mizbeach*. Go throughout the entire world to spread my words, my knowledge, my faith, my ethics, and my mitzvos. Spread *Eloku* over the world. *Hishalech lefanai ve'heve tamim*, not a *tamim* for yourself alone. Be a *tamim* for everyone. Not *Es haElokim hishalech Noach. Hishalech lefanai!* Spread the word! You have a mission! So Noach was *sur mera*, and Avraham and Moshe were *Sur mera vease tov*.

By *Iyov* you have the same thing. If a man is only a *sur mera*, and not an *ase tov*, you can ask: "Why don't you go to a meeting about building a Yeshiva or supporting it?" Yes, you learn yourself – yes, you create sharp pieces of Torah about the Rambam – yes, and you even learn Zohar. But whatever you do, still, about *tzarchei harabim*, there is no one with whom to go to the table. If a person is not an *ase tov*, it is impossible for him to avoid speaking *lashon hara*, since he cannot otherwise justify himself for not being an *ase tov!* If other Jews are just as good as he is, and *kol Yisroel hverim*, then you must be able and willing to sit with all of them at the table! He has no excuse for not participating! So he must speak *lashon hara*, not because he is hateful, misanthropic or jealous; not because he can't stand it if another has a little *kavod*, wealth or *lomdus*. Not because of this does he speak *lashon hara*. It is because he tries to justify himself, "How can I do something for this cause? The people involved are not worthy enough. So it is not appropriate for me to sit together with them. *Miyakirey Yerushalayim lo hayu yoshvim biseuda ad sheyedu mi haya yoshvim imahem*. It is possible that they never sat in a seudah, because they could always find reasons why "not at my table". *Leyda mi haya yoshev imahem* is bitter. Because automatically the result is *lashon hara*. By *Iyov* it does not say *veasa tov*, only *vesar mara*. *Chaza"l* wanted to present *Iyov* only as a *sur mera*. He was not an *ase tov*. So they pushed him in between these three who sat by Pharaoh in the ministry, when he asked, "What shall we do with the Jews?" Bilaam said, throw the children into the sea. *Iyov* held his peace. Yisro, the non-Jewish priest, was the one who protested and said, "Under no circumstances! How can you kill innocent children? Just because you, Pharaoh, are afraid, you have to kill Jewish children?" But *Iyov shasak*. Why did *Chaza"l* place him in such a situation? Because *Chaza"l* knew that *Iyov* was not an *ase tov*. *Iyov* himself would never have thrown children into the Nile. He was an *ish tam veyashar, viyere Elokim*. But when they were throwing Jewish children into the Nile, he was not ready to tear his clothes and fight with Pharaoh.

During the last war, there was such a personage as well, a "righteous person" in the world who was held to be a *kadosh*: Ghandi. When he died, Jews eulogized him. It was dangerous for a Rav not to eulogize Ghandi. They would have thrown him out of the shul! And when they killed six million Jews and many more millions of innocent people of other faiths, Ghandi did not say one word! Could Ghandi have thrown children into the gas chambers? *Has veshalom*. Ghandi would have been unable to do this. Certainly he was a *sur mera*. But he certainly was not in the category of *ase tov!*

So if someone is not an *ase tov* he must, perforce, fall into *lashon hara*. He must say something about why the other person is not good enough to sit together with him at the table. *Sof kol sof*, At the end of the day, it ends with *negaim* and *tzaraas*.

When did the RBSHO heal *Iyov*? In the end of the pasuk it says, *Veata, kechu lachem shiva parim veshiva eilim ulechu el avdi Iyov, vahaalitem ola*

*baadchem velyov avdi yispalel aleychem, ki im panav esa, levilti asos imachem nevala*. So the Ribono Shel Olam told Elipaz haTemani and his friends to bring *karbanos*, and ask *Iyov* to pray for them.

Where have you heard such a thing? If someone sins, who should pray? The *chotei* himself! Why should another plead for him? *Vayaasu kaasher diber aleyhem Adoshem, vayisa Adoshem pnei Iyov, Vaadoshem shav es shvus Iyov behispalelo baad reehu*.

The Ribono Shel Olam didn't need *Iyov's* tefila. The prayers of the three friends would have been enough. But the Ribono Shel Olam wanted *Iyov* to climb to a new level. *Iyov*, for the first time in his life, should be able to say a prayer for another person as well.

*Iyov* prayed a great deal in his life. It says, every Sunday, *Vayehi ki hikifu yemei hamishte, vayishlach Iyov vayekadshem, vehishkim baboker veheela olos mispar kulam, ki amar Iyov, ulay hat'u banay, obercho Elokim bilevavam, kacha yaase Iyov kol hayamim*. So he prayed and brought *korbanos*, but only for his own children. *Iyov* did not bring one *karban* for anyone else.

Jewish *tefilos* are not *belashon yahid!* All *tefilos* are *belashon rabim*. If a Jew has a sick brother, or son at home, he prays for him *besoch shear holey Yisrael*. By himself he is nothing. *Has Veshalom* when a Jew is in *avelus*, and we say to him, *Hamakom yenachem eschem*, we must add *besoch shear aveili Tzion viYerushalayim*. *Tefilas hayahid* doesn't exist. *Iyov* only prayed for his children, and if so you are not an *ase tov*, but only a *sur mera*.

The *Shmone Esre* is *belashon rabim*, *Refaenu Hashem Elokenu*. We never say, *Refaeni Adoshem Elokenu*.

In Hebrew there are two words, *shamor* and *natzor*. What is the difference between them? *Shamor* is if I simply watch an object. *Ki yiten ish el reeihu kesef o kelim lishmor*. How do I watch something? It is given into my possession, and I make sure it doesn't get lost, stolen, or destroyed by fire. I watch in a negative sense, that damage should not take place. A *shomer* doesn't have to do anything positive for the object he is guarding. *Natzor* means improving, cultivating the object, making sure it shall grow. *Notzer teina yochal piryo*. You have to do all kinds of work to make it grow: weed it, water it, and prune it. So *notzer* doesn't only mean that I take the object and watch it. It means I tend the object and improve it in a positive sense, *ase tov*.

The pasuk is interesting: *Ashrei temimei derech haholchim bederech Hashem*. There are many *temimim* who go in *derech Hashem*: Noach, for example. But Avraham's *temimus* is different. Noach was a *shomer*. Avraham was a *notzer, hishalech lefanai*, build, plant, and develop. *Vayita Eishel biBeer Sheva, Vayiven sham mizbeach*. So more important than *Ashrei temimei derech haholchim bederech Hashem*, is *Ashrei notzei eidosav, bechal lev yidreshuhu*. They will seek Him, spread His name, and plant.

Therefore *Chaza"l* explain very well. *Zos tihiyeh toras hametzora. Hu hadavar "Mi haish hahafetz hayim. Maase berochel echad shehaya mahazir baayaras, vehaya machriz veomer, 'Man baey hayay, man baey hayay. Rabbi Yanai hava yasiv. Shama demachriz. Amar ta sak lehacha. Zil li. Salik legabey, hotzi lo sefer Tehilim, her'a lo pasuk, "Mi haish hehafetz hayim: netzor leshoncha mera"*. Not *shemor* but *netzor*. The Torah did not mean, that to avoid *lashon hara* you have to shut your mouth and say nothing. The opposite of *lashon hara* is not *shetika!* The opposite of *lashon hara* is *davka* speaking, but talking how? Talking constructively, working, spreading Torah, *daas Hashem, yiras shamayim, masorah, kabalah*. *Netzor*, cultivate your tongue, *notzer te'eyna yochal pirya, Sur mera* is not enough. The opposite of *lashon hara* is *vease tov!* Because if you are not a *vease tov*, you must succumb to *lashon hara*.

*Amar Rav Yanai*, "O now I understand. I made a mistake. I had thought that not to talk *lashon hara* you have to keep silent! *Afshlomo mahriz*. I made a mistake because I looked in *Mishlei*, not in *Tehilim!* *Chaza"l* say, *Haroeh Shlomo yitzape lechochmah*. Shlomo's *Mishlei* is *Sefer Hachochmah*. *Tamachtu es yesodosay besefer hachochmah. Haroeh David bahalom yetzapeh lachasidus*. If you look from the standpoint of *chochmah*, from the

Shlomo standpoint, what is the opposite of *lashon hara*? No talking! Keeping silent! *Af Shlomo machriz: shomer piv uleshono shomer mitzarot nafsho*. I always thought that if a Jew wants to stay away from *lashon hara*, he does not have to teach anyone or help anyone. He does not have to become involved in the good of the community. He needs to do no planting, no building, and no learning *Torah barabim*. Keep your mouth shut and that is all! *Amar rav Yanay kol yamai hayisi kore hapasuk haze velo hayisi yodea heichan peshuto shel mikra!* I didn't understand what Shlomo was talking about! *Ad sheba rochel ze vehodia inyano*, that *Chochmah* is not enough, *chochmah* means keep silent, but with *hassidus*, you have to be *netzor leshoncha mera – sur mera vease tov*.

So *Chaza"l* in the *gemarah* said it very well. *Machriz Rav Alexandri, man baey hayai, man baey hayai, amar lahem, mi haish hehafetz hayim, veshema tomare elech veisgarei besheina?* If you may not speak *lashon hara*, it is better if a Jew should sleep away the time! At night a Jew certainly doesn't speak *lashon hara*! There are Jews who can sleep away 70 years! *Choni HaMeagel* did it – and didn't speak *lashon hara*! No, that is not the alternative of *lashon hara*, If you sleep and do not talk *lashon hara*, that is *gaava*, that is laziness, that is *sur mera*. That is *Iyov*, and that is why he was punished with *negaim*. *Veshema tomere elech veisgarei besheina?* *Talmud lomar, sur mera vase tov*, the alternative to *lashon hara* is not sleeping and keeping silent, but *davka dibur, veal ze Moshe mazhir es Yisroel, zos tihiye toras hametzorah, vehuva el hakohen*.

*Velakah hakohen shtey tziporim hayos*, So *Chaza"l* said very well, *Ilan tziporim kolanin*. These birds chirp. *Amar hakadosh baruch hu, yavo kol viyechaper al hakol*, The Ribono shel Olam, to characterize the *metzora*, should have brought a mute animal, to teach the *metzora* you have spoken *lashon hara*, see this mute animal, this sheep that is mute, and learn how to keep still, No! the Ribono Shel Olam required that birds that spend their entire life in chirping be brought. Why? Because the cure of *lashon hara* is not *shetika*. It is *davka dibur*. *Yavo kol viyechaper al hakol*. But it depends what kind of a *kol*. When the bird chirps, instinct drives it to do the *ratzon Hashem*.

The Rambam said it. He said that whatever a *haya* and a bird does, is one mitzvah after another, because whatever it does is not done by *behira* but by instinct, by the will of God, the law of nature. So the *dibur* of the bird is a holy *dibur*, and so the *kol* must come to atone for the *kol*, not silence, but the kind of *Dibur* that is the will of God, זאת תהיה תורת, ועל זה משה מזהיר את ישראל, וזהו בא אל הכהן ולקח הכהן למצורה שתי צפורין חיים.

### Shalom Zachar: Hodaah/Shabbos Protection/Forgotten Torah Chaim Ozer Shulman

In honor of an upcoming Bris of a grandson born to Moshe & Henny Shulman

On the first Friday night following the birth of a baby boy, it is customary to gather where the infant is located, to visit for a *shalom* זכר. As the Rema states (YD 265:12): *נהגו לעשות סעודה ומשתה בליל שבת לאחר שנולד זכר נכנסים אצל התינוק: "It is customary to make a meal and festive gathering on Friday evening after a male child is born where people enter to visit the home of the baby<sup>1</sup> and partake of some food there, and this too is considered a seudas mitzva."*<sup>2</sup>

#### Reason #1 – סעודת הודאה

Chazal refer to this gathering as *ישוע הבן*. The Gemara in **Bava Kamma 80a** states: *Rav*, רב ושמואל ורב אסי איקלעו לבי שבוע הבן ואמרי לה לבי ישוע הבן *Shmuel, and Rav Assi came to the house of the 'week of the son,' and some say to the house of the 'salvation of the son.'* Rashi explains *בני שבוע הבן*

1 While some frame the Shalom Zachar as a *nehom* אבלים as discussed below, suggesting that the infant's presence is essential, Rav Moshe Sternbuch in *תשובות והנהגות* (II; 202) states that since the other reasons of סעודת הודאה and סעודת קדושה apply even without the baby, the *minhag* is to make a Shalom Zachar at the parents' home [or, presumably, grandparents' home] even if the baby is still in the hospital.

2 The Rema describes the gathering as a סעודת מצוה, yet also uses the phrase *לשעום שם*. Most poskim do not classify it as a true סעודת מצוה but rather a *minhag*.

referring to *הבן*, while **Tosafos** in the name of Rabbeinu Tam (or as cited in the *Trumas Hadeshen – Rabbeinu Chananel*) interpret *בני ישוע הבן* *שעושיין שמחה על שניצול מן הסכנה*. 'the house of the salvation of the son, that one makes a celebration because the child was saved from danger.'

According to *Tosafos*, the gathering is fundamentally a **סעודת הודאה**, expressing gratitude that the infant has safely emerged from the סכנה of childbirth. The infant's arrival into the world is not taken for granted; it is recognized as an act of *yeshu'ah*.

The reason the סעודת הודאה is done on שבת ליל is given by the תרומת הדשן סעודת מצוה על שנושע ונמלט ממעי אמו...קבעה בלילי שבת בשעת שהכל מצויין #269 "for everyone is found at home at that time," making Shabbos night the natural time for the *Seudas Hodaah*.

#### Reason #2 – A Shabbos Protection

**Midrash Rabbah Emor 27:10** teaches: *משל למלך...משה תחת אמו...שנכנס למדינה וגזר ואמר כל אכסנאין שיש כאן לא יראו פני עד שיראו פני המטרונא תחלה כך אמר הקב"ה לא תביאו לפני קרבן עד שתעבר עליו שבת שאין שבעת ימים בלא שבת ואין מילה בלא שבת...משפט אדם ומשפט בהמה שוים משפט אדם וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו "And it shall be seven days under its mother... this may be compared to a king who entered a province and decreed that no guest may appear before him until first appearing before the Matrona (queen; consort) So too HKBH says do not bring an offering before Me or perform a Bris until it has passed through a Shabbos for there are no seven days without Shabbos and there is no milah without Shabbos ...the law governing man and the law governing an animal are parallel, the law of man On the eighth day his foreskin shall be circumcised and the law of an animal, from the eighth day and onward it shall be accepted."*

Before entering the bris, **the baby must first encounter Shabbos**, the *מטרונא*. Shabbos thus serves as a **protective and preparatory stage**, enveloping the newborn in קדושה before the bris.

A related idea is found in the *Zohar Yisro 27:445* (also quoted by Rav Sternbuch below) "All blessings, above and below, depend upon the seventh day."

Similarly the *Tshuvos vHanhagos II;202* from Rav Moshe Sternbuch says: ומיהו נראה שעיקר הטעם שמשום שבבת הוא ע"פ מה שמבואר בזה"ק שכל השבוע מתברך משבת קודש ולכן יש השיבות לשבת שלפני הנישואין או לפני מילה או אפילו לפני יאהרצייט כי אז הזמן שהשפע כבר מוכן רק יורד כל דבר בזמנו ולכן בשבת מודה אבי הבן ומשבה לה' על השפע וברכה דמילה שבא כבר אז בשבת וכל אחד בא ומברך אותו ומסייע זכות הרבים "It appears that the primary reason for Friday night Shalom Zachar is based on the Zohar's teaching that the entire week is blessed from Shabbos. There is special significance to the Shabbos preceding a wedding, a bris, or even a *yahrzeit*, as at that time the flow of *bracha* is already prepared, though it descends in its proper time. Therefore, on Shabbos thanks and praise to Hashem is given for the shefa *bracha* of the bris that has already begun, and people come to bless the baby, with the merit of the *tzibur* helping to draw down further blessing and shefa, as all join in gratitude, joy, and praise of Hashem for His kindness."

#### Reason #3 – Remembering the Forgotten Torah

Alongside this framework of Hodaah and Shabbos protection, a third interpretation appears in the *Acharonim*. The *Derisha* on the *Tur* (YD 264) writes: מה שנוהגין בשבת לבקר אצל התינוק הנולד משום שהוא אבל על תורתו ששכח "The custom to visit a newborn on Shabbos is because he is in a **state of mourning over the Torah he has forgotten**, as stated in the Gemara in *Niddah*... and it would seem that for this reason milah was given on the eighth day, after the days of mourning have passed."

This is rooted in the Gemara in *Niddah 30b*: *וכיון... כל התורה כולה... וכיון... "A baby in utero is taught the entire Torah... but when he comes into the world, an angel strikes him on the mouth and causes him to forget all of it."* The *Taz* (and *Shach*) explain: *והוא כמו נהום אבלים, דהתינוק אבל הוא על התורה ששכח: "It is like comforting the infant who is in mourning over the Torah he has forgotten."*

Here, the Shalom Zachar (or in this case Zachor) becomes an acknowledgment of the Torah that is lost and must be relearned.<sup>3</sup>

### What Was Really Forgotten?

The explanation that the infant is *אבל על תורתו שלמד במעי אמו ושכחה* invites a deeper question: what is this lost Torah? What does it mean that *מלמדיו אותו כל התורה כולה... וכיון שבא לאויר העולם בא מלאך וסטרו על פיו ומשכחו כל התורה כולה*? Another question: the Gemara in Kiddushin 30b says Torah is the antidote to the yetzer hara *“I created the evil inclination, and I created Torah as its remedy,”* why remove it at the very moment one enters a world of *הyetzer hara?*

The Gemara in Niddah 30b describe that period in utero as one of unparalleled clarity. *“There are no days in which a person is in a state of greater טוב than those days”* reflected in the verse: *“Who will return me to the months of old... when the secret of God rested upon my tent.”* (Iyov 29). The Maharsha, relating this to the Gemara in Sanhedrin 91b which notes that while the *נשמה* is present from the earliest stage, the *יצר הרע* asserts itself at birth *לפתח חטאת רובין*. The moment of birth is thus entry into a world of struggle.

It may be that the Torah taught in utero is not Torah in its practical form, but its **inner essence** *פנימיות התורה* a direct awareness of divine truth of the *סוד* described by Iyov. This resembles the knowledge of the *מלאכים* who perceive truth but do not engage in learning Torah as given at Sinai *לא ניתנה להם למלאכי השרת*.

But such knowledge, precisely because it is effortless, cannot sustain a person in this world. Even *הראשון*, in a state of pure טוב, was not immune to failure. Once a person is born, and the struggle with the *יצר הרע* begins *עמל* is required. As the Gemara Kiddushin 30b, quoted above, says *אם אתם עוסקים בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו... ואם לאו לפתח חטאת רובין*. If you engage and toil in Torah learning the yetzer hara can be overcome.

From this perspective, the forgetting is not merely a loss, but a necessary transition. The child must relinquish an innate clarity in order to acquire Torah anew through effort.

The Shalom Zachar thus becomes not only a response to what has been lost, but a recognition of what lies ahead. It is, in part, a quiet charge, to take a *נשמה טהורה* and nurture it through *תורה* and *יר"ש*, so that it may, through effort, be safe from the yetzer hara and regain some of the clarity it once possessed.

## RAV SCHACHTER ON THE PARSHA Vol II

Insights and Commentary Based on the Shiurim of Rav Hershel Schachter  
Adapted by Dr. Allan Weissman <https://a.co/d/2aj0sJs>

Reprinted with permission from Dr. Weissman

### PARSHAS TAZRIA – CLASSES OF TUM'AH

The Mishnah in Kereisos (8b) teaches that a yoledes (a woman who has given birth) is one of four mechusrei kapparah (literally, those lacking atonement), along with a zav, zavah, and metzorah. Despite their immersing in a mikveh and waiting until shki'ah (or in the case of a yoledes, the end of her forty or eighty-day melos, that consists of some days of tum'ah and some days of taharah), these individuals remain tamei with respect to eating kodshim and entering the Beis HaMikdash until they bring specific purification korbanos. The Mishnah (8a) teaches that if a woman gave birth several times, and is therefore obligated to bring several sets of korbanos, once she brings one set, she may partake of kodshim and enter the Beis HaMikdash. This is because bringing the korbanos mechusrei kapparah is considered the completion of the taharah process. The Gemara therefore compares the korbanos to tevilah in a mikveh. One who contacted five

instances of tum'ah is tahor as soon as he is tovel one time, since he had a single state of tum'ah that tevilah removes. Similarly, one set of korbanos is metaher a yoledes from a number of births, even though she remains obligated to bring the rest of the sets of her korbanos.

The Gemara in Nedarim (35b) also relates to the idea that the korban yoledes is a metaher. Whenever one brings a korban to the Beis HaMikdash, da'as (consent) of the person on whose behalf it is offered is required, both when the korban is consecrated and when it is offered. The Gemara explains that the korbanos of mechusrei kapparah are exceptions to this rule. A man may bring this type of korban for his young children who have tum'as zav or for his wife who is a shotah after she has given birth, despite their lack of ability to give consent. Again, this type of korban is similar to the taharah of immersing in a mikvah. One does not require intent for tevilah (mid'oraisa; see Chullin 31a-31b), and the same is true for the korbanos of mechusrei kapparah.

The need for a korban in order for these teme'im to complete their taharah process highlights the stringency of the class of tum'ah that affects the mechusrei kapparah. Tum'as sheretz and tum'as meis are examples of tum'as magga – tum'ah that results from contact with something external that is tamei. This type of tum'ah is transmitted through touching a sheretz or by being under the same roof as a meis. In contrast to tum'as magga, the mechusrei kapparah possess a *טומאה היוצאה עליו מגופו*, where the tum'ah originates within one's own body, and this is considered a more severe form of tum'ah.

For example, some Rishonim maintain that the leniency of *ספק טומאה ברשות* – a tum'ah uncertainty that occurs in a public domain is deemed tahor (Taharos 4:11) is limited to cases of tum'as magga (see Tosfos, Niddah 2a, s.v. mei'eis, and Shitah Mekubetzes, Bava Kamma 11a, s.v. d'ein, against the view of Tosfos, Bava Kamma 11a, s.v. d'ein).

Likewise, the Mishnah in Pesachim (95b) teaches that in the event a majority of the tzibbur is tamei meis on the fourteenth of Nissan and the Korban Pesach is offered in a state of tum'ah, zavim, zavos, niddos, and yoldos may not eat from it. The dispensation allowing the Pesach to be offered and eaten b'tum'ah applies only to forms of tum'as magga, not to those individuals who contracted a *טומאה היוצאה עליו מגופו*. Similarly, a tzibbur that is tamei with such a self-issuing tum'ah may not offer the Korban Pesach in this state. The Rambam (Hilchos Bi'as Mikdash 4:12; Hilchos Korban Pesach 7:1), against the view of Tosfos (Zevachim 17b; 22b), maintains that the prohibition to offer a korban b'tum'ah is only overridden for tum'as meis, and not even for other forms of tum'as magga.

Another difference between tum'as magga and *טומאה היוצאה עליו מגופו* on a level of d'oraisa relates to entry into Har HaBayis. The Gemara in Pesachim (67a) notes that the word *מחנה* appears three times in the pessukim that discuss the mitzvah to send the teme'im outside the various machanos: *צו את בני ישראל וישלחו מן המחנה כל צרוע וכל זב וכל טמא לנפש מזכר עד נקבה תשלחו אל מחוץ למחנה תשלחוהו ולא יטמאו את מחניהם אשר אני שוכן בתוכם*. Command Bnei Yisrael that they shall expel from the camp everyone with tzara'as, everyone who has had a zav-emission, and everyone contaminated by a human corpse... (Bamidbar 5:2–3). The Gemara explains that these three machanos correspond, in descending order of kedushah, to *מחנה שכינה* (Azarah), *מחנה* (Har HaBayis), and *מחנה ישראל* (Yerushalayim). The passuk lists three impure individuals – the metzorah, the zav, and the tamei meis – in order of decreasing tum'ah, teaching that these individuals may not enter these three machanos, respectively.

A metzorah has the highest level of tum'ah, and he is forbidden to enter all three camps, even *מחנה ישראל*. The next tamei individual, the zav, represents the category of *טומאה היוצאה עליו מגופו*. All teme'im in this category are excluded from both *מחנה שכינה* and *מחנה לוייה*. Finally, a tamei meis, whose tum'ah is less severe since it is merely a tum'as magga, is only excluded from *מחנה שכינה*. Rabbinically, the Har HaBayis was divided into three sections, and a tamei meis was not allowed into the inner two sections (Mishnah Keilim 1:8).

<sup>3</sup> The minhag of Shalom Zachar has been traditionally limited to a boy. One explanation links it directly to the impending bris milah; another ties it to the concept of forgotten Torah. At the same time, according to Tosafot's framework of Seudas Hodaah, one might have expected a parallel for a girl. In practice, this dimension is often expressed through other forms of thanksgiving like a kiddush.

The nature of tum'as ba'al keris is the subject of a machlokes Tanna'im (Sifrei, Devarim 23:11) regarding his permissibility to enter Har HaBayis. The machlokes depends on whether tum'as ba'al keris is classified as a טומאה מגופו like tum'as zav, or whether a ba'al keris becomes tamei through contact with the emission itself, thus labeling his tum'ah as tum'as magga (Rash, Keilim 1:1). The Rambam implies that a ba'al keris may indeed enter the Har HaBayis.

Acharonim raise the question of why religious Jews for centuries have abstained from entering even the outer section of Har HaBayis, where a tamei meis is permitted. Rav Eliezer Nachum suggests that the takanah of tum'as am ha'aretz applies. Chazal treated one not careful in hilchos tum'ah as a zav. Nowadays, we may all have that status, thus prohibiting entry. However, this is questionable, since am ha'aretz status may require actual violations, not mere passive tum'ah. Additionally, the gezeirah may only apply regarding contact with a chaver, not personal entry restrictions. Despite these arguments, it is important to follow the Rabbanut's position forbidding entry, as widespread leniency would likely lead to violations. There is also a din derabbanan distinguishing tum'as magga from טומאה מגופו. The Gemara in Bechoros (27a) teaches that rabbinic terumah is prohibited only to a Kohen with internal tum'ah, not tum'as magga. Thus, theoretically, a niddah could separate challah and give it to a minor Kohen or an immersed adult Kohen. However, the Shach records the Ashkenazic minhag that Kohanim refrain from eating challah today due to uncertain lineage.

Although mid'oraisa a Kohen may be believed regarding his own status, Chazal required independent verification due to concerns of yuchsin. In pressing circumstances, however, halachah reverts to the Torah standard, allowing reliance on self-identification, as seen in cases of gittin and chalitzah. Similarly, today most Kohanim rely on self-identification due to historical disruptions. Because this violates the rabbinic standard, the minhag developed for Kohanim to abstain from eating challah until lineage can be verified.

## **PARTIES, BALLGAMES AND MOVIES DURING SEFIRAH**

### **Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz**

Chair RIETS Semicha Programs, Rabbi of Beis HaKnesses of North Woodmere

The Gemara, Yevamos 62, tells us that R' Akiva advises to continue to teach and amass talmidim even while advancing in age. This advice was based on his own experience in perpetuating Torah She'ba'al Peh (through his talmidim from later in life—Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Rabbi Yosi, and Rabbi Elozor ben Shamua) even after 12,000 pairs of his original talmidim had died between Pesach and Shavuos for not being noheg kavod zeh lazeh, for not respecting one another. Again, in the time of the Crusades, terrible tragedies happened to the Jewish communities of the Rhine River Valley during the period between Pesach and Shavuos (Taz and Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chayim 493). Some of these catastrophes are recorded in the Kinos that we recite on Tisha B'Av. Although the Gemara highlights the tragedy of the demise of so many great Torah scholars, the Gemara is not specific as to the precise timing of this tragedy (an ambiguity that has led to divergent practices as to which of the days of sefirah should be observed), nor how to properly mourn this tragedy. Importantly, for the purposes of this essay, the Gemara does not teach us of any specific mourning practices that should be observed during this period. The Shulchan Aruch, however, does highlight two particular practices of mourning that should be observed during this period. First, based on many sources in the Geonim, the Shulchan Aruch 493:1 says the minhag is not to get married during the mourning period of sefirah, but betrothal (le'ares ulekadash) is permitted. The Shulchan Aruch (493:2) adds that even if somebody performs nisuin (marriage), we don't punish him. Second, the Shulchan Aruch rules, based on the Tur (493), to refrain from haircuts during this time.

Is There a Difference between Sefirah & Bein Hametzarim? The closest parallel on the Jewish calendar to the period of sefirah is the period of "bein

hametzarim," commonly referred to as "The Three Weeks." However, there is some debate among poskim as to whether these two time periods are fundamentally similar. Rav Ovadya Yosef, Yechaveh Da'as 3:30, argues that these time periods are very different from each other. The days of bein hametzarim are fundamentally sad times, whereas Ramban says that the days of sefirah are like a Chol Hamoed of sorts, in that they bridge the holidays of Pesach and Shavuos. In other words, mourning practices are a natural fit during the bein hametzarim, whereas they are observed during sefirah to commemorate anomalous events that occurred. It therefore follows that saying Shehecheyanu and moving into a new house (especially in Eretz Yisrael where it is a mitzvah) would be prohibited during The Three Weeks but permissible during sefirah. Only forms of excessive simcha, such as weddings, haircuts and music, are forbidden during sefirah. Similarly, Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, Tzitz Eliezer 18:41, also says that strictly speaking the only prohibited activities during sefirah are weddings, haircuts, and music. All other forms of mourning would be dependent on minhag (custom). He therefore concludes that as long as one doesn't have a minhag to the contrary one may say Shehecheyanu, make home improvements, go swimming, etc. Despite this view of poskim that distinguishes these two time periods, there are several indications that they are similar, and that the period of sefirah is not a fundamentally happy time. In fact, it is possible that the period of sefirah is a time of mourning and sadness even on a Biblical level. Moreinu HaRav Schachter shlit"a often mentions that the Zohar considers sefirah to be a Biblical period of mourning unrelated to the death of the students of Rabbi Akiva, and explains that it is because of this Biblical element of aveilus that we don't recite complete Hallel on Shevi'i shel Pesach in commemoration of the miracle of kriyas Yam Suf, even though we do recite Hallel Shaleim to commemorate other miracles (such as the miracles of Chanukah). Indeed, the Magen Avraham says that we should refrain from singing and dancing during the period of sefirah. The Mishnah Berurah 493:2 says "ain l'harbos b'simcha"—we should not increase simcha, but permits Shehecheyanu in a situation where it happened (im nizdamnu lo). There is a dispute among the Acharonim (quoted in the Dirshu edition of the Mishnah Berurah) as to whether the Mishnah Berurah would even allow saying a Shehecheyanu lechatchila. If the Mishnah Berurah does allow recitation of Shehecheyanu during sefirah, he clearly distinguishes between this period and that of bein hametzarim, but if the Mishnah Berurah in fact holds that we may not recite Shehecheyanu during sefirah, he may hold that they are similar. As a matter of halacha, Rav Soloveitchik, cited in Nefesh Harav pages 191–192, based on the Magen Avraham and his own analysis, says that we can assume the period of mourning is patterned after some actual halachos of aveilus, so all the laws that a mourner observes in the 12 months for a parent should apply. Rav Moshe Feinstein, Igros Moshe, Even HaEzer 1:98, also agrees that both time periods should probably be treated the same way, but in dealing with a party for a wedding, combines the possibility that sefirah is different from The Three Weeks with the idea that it is a seudas mitzvah to be lenient in a particular scenario.

Practical Application to Parties, Ballgames and Movies When it comes to the question of attending parties during sefirah, it would depend on which opinion one follows in the above discussion. If you hold like Rav Soloveitchik, it is prohibited to have any sort of simchas merei'us (social party) even without music. If you hold like Rav Ovadya, it should be permissible. If you hold like Rav Moshe, you would need additional considerations for leniency such as a mitzvah purpose. However, the precise definition of a party is not so clear. It is difficult, for example, to clearly define at what point a social gathering moves from a small meal with friends into the category of a full-blown party. Moreinu Rav Schachter shlit"a thought that having one or two couples over for a barbecue is permissible during sefirah since that does not yet rise to the level of a "party," but more than that is a problem. A shul or yeshiva dinner, for example, involves many friends getting together and eating in large crowds. However, it would also have the leniency of mitzvah purpose so it should be permissible, according to Rav Moshe. Moreinu Rav Schachter shlit"a was once asked about an

Abraham Lincoln enthusiast attending a dinner with Lincoln scholars during sefirah. Rav Schachter thought that even Rav Soloveitchik would say it is permissible because it is an intellectual rather than a social event, since the majority of the attendees are non-Jews with whom the questioner has very little in common. One can argue that ballgames and movies are not similar to a party in that it is not a place to socialize with other people, but just to enjoy entertainment. However, Moreinu Rav Schachter shlit" a has said that according to Rav Soloveitchik, a ballgame would be considered a simchas merei'us and therefore prohibited during sefirah. The Rav held that since it is fun, it should be prohibited. Rav Aron Soloveitchik added that since your pleasure is enhanced by a larger crowd, it is prohibited. When it comes to attending movies (presuming that the movie is "kosher") at a theatre, Rav Soloveitchik thought it is prohibited because it is also for fun. However, Rav Aron Soloveitchik didn't think this counts as simchas merei'us since your pleasure isn't enhanced by a larger crowd.

Endnote: It should be noted that Rav Moshe Feinstein in his Igros Moshe, Chelek 8:4 YD:11 writes that going to theaters and stadiums does not fall into the prohibition of bechukoseihem lo telechu. However, he writes that one should not attend due to moshav letzim, bitul Torah, and other reasons. REITS Torah To-Go Series Pesach 5782

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> ravfrand@torah.org  
date: Apr 16, 2026, 10:51 AM

subject: Rav Frand - Parshas **Tazria** –

### **The Lesson of House Tzaraas: Nothing Is Your Stuff**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1377 – An In Vitro Fertilization Baby, Can You Do His Milah on Shabbos? Good Shabbos!

The Lesson of House Tzaraas: Nothing Is Your Stuff

The pasuk in Parshas Metzora says "When you arrive in the Land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I will place a tzaraas affliction upon a house in the land of your possession." (Vayikra 14:34). Parshiyos Tazria and Metzora deal with different types of tzaraas: tzaraas that appears on a person's body, tzaraas that appears on clothing, and tzaraas that appears on the walls of a house.

As the Torah describes, when such a blemish appears on the walls of a person's house, he comes to the kohen and he says, "k'nega" (something like a blemish) has appeared on the walls of my house." (Vayikra 14:35) The kohen instructs that the house be emptied out so that nothing is in the house when the kohen views the nega (lest everything in the house become tameh (impure) when he proclaims the house tameh).

The Kli Yakar points out several anomalies in the pesukim that describe this process. First, he asks why tzaraas habayis (house leprosy) is introduced with the words "When you come to the Land of Canaan?" Next, he points out that the follow-on phrase, "that I am giving to you as an inheritance" is totally superfluous. We already know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us Eretz Yisrael! Also, the repetition of the phrase "b'beis erez achuzaschem" (in the house of the land of your inheritance) at the end of the pasuk is redundant and unnecessary. Furthermore, why the switch in expressions from "asher Ani nosen lachem l'achuza" to "beis erez achuzaschem"? Finally, the Kli Yakar questions the expression at the beginning of the next pasuk: "U'ba asher lo habayis" (and the one to whom the house belongs will come). Who else is going to come? Of course, it is asher lo habayis (the owner of the house) who will be coming to the kohen with this problem!

The Kli Yakar refers to a Gemara (in Eruchin 16) that comments on the words "u'ba asher lo habayis" – that this refers to "mi shemeyached bayso lo" (someone who keeps his house for himself). In other words, the Gemara in Eruchin says that tzaraas comes for a variety of reasons. The most common reason is lashon harah (tale bearing). Another reason is gayvah (haughtiness). Specifically, tzaraas habayis comes for stinginess (tzorus ayin), when someone is unwilling to share his possessions.

The Ribono shel Olam knows how to take care of such a person who doesn't want to lend out anything to anyone. The Gemara there explains what happens to such a person: For example, his neighbor comes to him and says "Listen, can I borrow some folding chairs? I am making sheva brochos." He responds, "I don't have any folding chairs." Another neighbor comes and says, "Listen, my lawn mower broke. Do you mind if I borrow your lawn mower?" He responds, "I really don't have my own lawn mower. I have a service that mows my lawn." A third neighbor comes and says, "My wife had to take my car this morning. Can I borrow your car?" He responds, "It is in the shop" (when really it is in the garage). And so on and so forth. He doesn't lend out anything.

The Gemara says that the Ribono shel Olam knows how to 'fix' this type of person. It is not a vindictive punishment. The Torah wants to teach him a lesson – to not be so stingy. What happens? When a "nega appears to him in his house," before the kohen views the nega, the owner needs to take out every stitch of furniture and possession. Lo and behold, all the folding chairs and the lawn mower and the car are on the sidewalk in front of his house. The fellow is revealed to be a tzar ayin.

What lesson is the Ribono shel Olam trying to teach this person? The lesson is that "things are not yours!" Even when things are in a person's possession, that does not make them "his!" When Hashem gives a person possessions, they are not truly his – they are like a pikadon, a deposit entrusted to him. The person is supposed to share those possessions with others when others need them. This doesn't mean that someone is obligated to make his house or his possessions hefker, such that every Tom, Dick, or Harry who rolls down the street can have free reign over his property. Rather, it is what I like to call the principle of "prudent stewardship."

The Ribono shel Olam gave us all these things. We are the stewards of this property. So, when a 16-year-old who got his driver's license yesterday, asks to borrow your car, it is perfectly justifiable to say "No. You wreck your father's car first before I lend my car to you." That is prudent stewardship because a 16-year-old who just got his license yesterday probably does not know how to drive very well.

But in general, when Hakadosh Baruch Hu blesses a person with wealth, it is meant to be shared with others. Therefore, says the Kli Yakar, this is what the pasuk is emphasizing in so many ways. "When you come to Eretz Canaan THAT I GIVE YOU AS AN INHERITANCE." The emphasis is that I gave you this land. I gave you this house. I gave you these possessions. They are not yours!

People have the attitude "I bought this with my hard-earned money." This is all about "Kochi v'otzem yodi osoh li es hachayil hazeh" (My strength and the power of my hand made me this.) (Devorim 8:17). The person doesn't want to part with these things because this is his stuff! The Ribono shel Olam is trying to teach us "Nothing is your stuff!" The Ribono shel Olam gave you that money.

Again, your possessions are not hefker, but they are yours in order to help others when possible. That is why the pasuk emphasizes "that I gave to you as an achuzah" (inheritance). If you refuse to share, "I will place a tzaraas blemish upon beis erez achuzaschem." You said it is my house, my chairs, my lawn mower, mine, mine, mine. That is why the pasuk needs to emphasize "u'ba asher lo habayis." The person who says "it is MY house" needs to come to the kohen. This plague comes to him because he felt too strongly that the house and its possessions belonged solely to him. He is not the owner of these possessions. He is the custodian.

The kohen will order him to empty out his house. This way everyone sees the reality. The homeowner will then need to think "Why is this happening to me?" The Torah wants him to conclude that it was because he was being too stingy, too much of a tzar ayin, a person who doesn't want to share.

Complements are the Easiest and Cheapest Chessed Out There  
The second insight I want to share also comes from Parshas Metzora. The Torah delineates the process of how a person who was a metzora becomes tahar (pure). The kohen goes out of the camp to visit the isolated metzora. If

he sees that the tzaraas has healed he orders two live kosher birds be taken for the metzora (as his purification offering) along with etz erez, u'shnee tola'as, v'ezov (cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop) (Vayikra 14:4). What are done with these two birds? One bird is slaughtered upon an earthenware vessel over spring water. The second bird is dipped into the blood of the slaughtered kosher bird. This blood is then sprinkled upon the metzora and the second bird is then sent out free over the open field. This treatment of the second bird is unique among all korbanos (sacrifices). This is the only korban (sacrifice) that is not slaughtered, but rather is sent away alive. Normally, shechita is an essential avodah for any korban! What is the symbolism of the fact that the second bird is sent away alive?

The Gemara (in Eruchin 16b) says the reason that birds are the appropriate korban (as opposed to animal offerings) for the metzora: "He performs a deed of chattering; therefore, the Torah said, 'Let him bring as an offering a chatterer.'" Tzaraas comes for the aveira of lashon horah (the aveira of a person who talks incessantly, and in the course of such conversation, he says evil about other people). Birds talk incessantly. They are constantly chirping. The Torah is trying to send the person a message: Your aveira was that you talked too much. Therefore, you bring birds to remind you of the incessant talking of which you were guilty. But why shecht one and send the other one away? The Zohar explains that the two birds represent different kinds of conversation: One is for 'bad speech' (what the Zohar calls 'lishna bisha,' i.e. – lashon harah) and one is for 'good speech' (what the Zohar calls 'lishna tava').

The Sefas Emes and others explain that when the Zohar speaks of "the aveira of lishna tava," it doesn't simply mean talking good. Rather, it is means refraining from talking good. When you can say something nice to a person, and when you know that a person is down and you are in a position to give him encouragement and cheer him up, but you hesitate to get involved and don't want to start a conversation, you refrain from offering "lishna tava." That is what the second bird offering is about.

Two offerings are brought: One for speaking negatively when you should have kept quiet, and one for not speaking when you should have spoken positively. And that is why one korban is shechted and one korban is sent away. One bird is shechted – you kill it! You stop speaking lashon harah. But the other bird that is sent away and lives is symbolic of that other type of conversation that you are supposed to engage in. You are not supposed to squelch it.

Rabbi Buchspan cites a Medrash Rabbah, which is actually a pasuk in Mishlei. The pasuk says, "Death and life are in the hands of the tongue" (Mishlei 18:21). The simple interpretation of that pasuk is that a person can literally be destroyed and ruined through speech. You can ruin a person's shidduch, you can ruin his business, and you can ruin his life with lashon harah. Speech is literally a matter of life or death. However, this Zohar provides us with a new insight into that pasuk. Mav'es (death) is when you speak lashon harah; chayim (life) is when you can, so to speak, resurrect the dead, i.e. – uplift a person's spirits by saying something positive, something nice to him. The pasuk doesn't mean that speech is a matter of life and death. It means there is speech that causes life and speech that causes death. Positive speech, chizuk, empathy and sympathy is the "lishna tava" that we are going to be held accountable for (not speaking).

The Medrash says on that pasuk: Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said to his servant: Go to the market and buy the best thing there! The servant came back with tongue. Tongue is among the most expensive types of meat. If you go to the deli and order yourself a pound of tongue, you will pay a fortune. What is better than tongue? Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel then told his servant: Go to the market and bring me back the worst thing there. Again, the servant came back with tongue.

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said to his servant, how can tongue be both the best thing in the market and the worst thing in the market at the same time? The servant responded – that is exactly correct. Tongue can be the best thing and it can be the worst thing; but he was not talking about sliced tongue. He was talking about what a person does with his own tongue.

A person recently came over to me and told me the following story: His son and daughter were shopping in Monsey before Pesach. They finished shopping, got back into the car ready to leave, and the son saw across the street a Rebbi he once had in yeshiva. He told his sister, "I just want to say 'Shalom' to my Rebbi and tell him how much I appreciate what he did for me." He went across the street, gave 'Shalom' to the Rebbi, came back across, and got back into the car.

The brother then remembered that he had to go into one more store. In the meantime, his sister saw her sixth grade English teacher walking down the street. She said to herself, "What my brother did is a nice idea. I am going to thank my English teacher for what she did for me." She got out of the car, walked over to her former teacher and said, "I want you to know that you taught me all that I know about English, and when I applied to a 'high-end Beis Yakov school' and I had to write an essay, it is because of what you taught me about the English language that I got in. My life has changed because I got into such a high-end Beis Yakov. Therefore, I want to thank you for being such a good English teacher."

A few days later, her parents got a note from that teacher telling them the following story:

I have been teaching for 37 years. When the school asked me if I wanted to come back next year to teach, I told my husband "I think I am finished with teaching. I have been teaching for 37 years. I don't think I am relating to the girls anymore. When you start teaching, you are maybe ten years older than your students. When you are in your sixties, you are forty years older than your students. I don't think I relate to the girls anymore. We don't need the income. I think I am going to tell the principal that I am ready to retire." She wrote in the note: I had to give my final answer to the school the next day. Just that day, your daughter came to me and told me that I made all the difference in her life. "Because of the way you taught me, I got into the right high school, etc., etc." The woman said "Because of that, I decided not to retire."

This is not only a story about hashgocha pratis. (This woman had to give an answer the next day whether she was going to continue teaching or not. She actually prayed to the Ribono shel Olam for a siman whether she should retire or not. Then this former student tells her this!) This is the meaning of the Zohar that we are going to be held accountable for both lishna bisha and lishna tava. One complement can make all the difference to a person. Here an adult woman made a life decision based on a complement from a sixth grader!

As I always say, "It costs nothing to give a complement. It is the easiest and cheapest chessed out there! I don't need to write a check. I don't need to go anywhere. Talk is cheap. With a little talk, you can bring the dead back to life!" That is what the Zohar means that we will be held accountable, not only for the lishna bisha but for lishna tava (that we didn't speak) as well. This explains the symbolism of the slaughtered bird and the bird that is sent away, and this explains the pasuk in Mishlei: "Life and death are in the hands of the tongue."

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

Rav Frand © by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

---

Parashat Tazria Metzora  
 Kol Torah Tazria Metzora 2026/5786  
**Forgetting to Light Shabbat Candles**  
**By Rabbi Chaim Jachter**  
 The Case  
 One of America's top Poskim, Rav Asher Bush (Teshuvot Shoel BeShelomo 1:16), wrote a Teshuvah regarding a woman who forgot to light Neiroth

Shabbat, but the electric lights were lit for Shabbat. The woman asked Rav Bush whether she must follow the Rama's ruling (O.C. 263:1) that a woman who forgets to light Neiroi Shabbat must light an additional candle every subsequent week. Significantly, the Rama's source is the Maharil, a late Ashkenazic Rishon who records Minhagim. Because this requirement to light an additional candle is a custom of later origin, there is room to treat it more lightly than if it were a full-fledged Halachah.

A simple explanation for this custom (see Mishnah Berurah 263:7) is that it is a fine (Kenas) for forgetting to light candles. The Kenas is a potent reminder to light candles every week. A more esoteric explanation is that Neiroi Shabbat serve as a Tikun (reparation) for Chavah's sin of eating from the Eitz HaDa'at. Lighting candles brings light into the world, which replaces the light that was removed when Chavah sinned.

The consensus of Poskim regards electricity as acceptable for Shabbat candles. Nonetheless, we must ask if electric lights lit without intention to fulfill the Mitzvah of Neiroi Shabbat nevertheless count towards her fulfillment of the Mitzvah.

#### Chovat HaBayit

Rav Bush seeks to demonstrate that the Mitzvah of Neiroi Shabbat can be fulfilled even if the woman does not light the candles. For example, if the woman is unable to light, her husband (or any other household member) is obligated to light. Lighting candles is an obligation incumbent upon the house (Chovat HaBayit), not upon the woman (Chovat HaGuf). Therefore, Poskim do not impose the Kenas if the husband lit, for the main purpose of Neiroi Shabbat—to illuminate the house for Shabbat—has been achieved. Similarly, if a woman remembers during Bein HaShemashot (Halachic twilight, approximately 20 minutes after sundown) that she did not light Neiroi Shabbat, she may instruct a non-Jew to light for her.

Thus, we see that the Neiroi Shabbat obligation is not focused on the actual lighting, but rather on having the house lit. Accordingly, since in our case the house was lit by electric lights for Shabbat, logically no Kenas is necessary, since the Mitzvah's purpose was fulfilled.

#### Lighting Early – Rabbeinu Tam vs. Rabbeinu Meshulam

Nevertheless, the scope of this principle is disputed. Tosafot (Shabbat 25b s.v. Chovah) present Rabbeinu Meshulam's view that if a candle was burning before Shabbat, there is no need to extinguish it and relight it for Neiroi Shabbat. Rabbeinu Meshulam feels that if the house is lit for Shabbat, there is no need to light a candle specifically for Neiroi Shabbat. According to this approach, the woman in Rav Bush's case fulfilled the Mitzvah of Neiroi Shabbat, for although she did not intend to light for Shabbat, the Mitzvah can be fulfilled without such intent if the house has light.

However, Tosafot also cite Rabbeinu Tam, who rejects Rabbeinu Meshulam, arguing that the candle must be extinguished and relit for Neiroi Shabbat.

Rabbeinu Tam believes that although it does not matter how the house became lit up, it must be illuminated for Shabbat. According to this position, the woman in our case fulfilled the Mitzvah only if she lit the electric lights with the intention of illuminating the house for Shabbat. The Rama (O.C. 263:4) codifies Rabbeinu Tam's view.

The Bi'ur Halacha (263:6 s.v. Bachurim) explains that there are two distinct aspects to Neiroi Shabbat. First, every person is required to light candles (Ma'aseh Hadlakah). Second, there must be light in every room that a person intends to use, such that no one's Oneg Shabbat will be disrupted by lack of light (Shalom Bayit). To fulfill the Mitzvah, both requirements must be met. In Rav Bush's case, the need for Shalom Bayit was met since the house was lit.

Rav Bush contends that even though the woman did not intend to fulfill the Mitzvah with the electric lights, she performed the requisite Ma'aseh Hadlakah. The Mishnah Berurah (263:20) rules that if a light was lit after Plag HaMinchah for the sake of illuminating the house for Shabbat, B'dieved the Mitzvah has been fulfilled even if there was no intent to accept Shabbat with this lighting. Rav Bush argues that if electric lights were lit after Plag HaMinchah, we can assume they were lit for the sake of Shabbat. Therefore,

the woman's lighting can be considered a Ma'aseh Hadlakah, meaning she fulfilled both requirements, and the Rama's Kenas would not apply.

#### Questioning Rav Bush

However, if a woman fulfills the Mitzvah via electric lights even without intention, how can she later light candles with a Berachah? Does this not violate the principle "Kol HaMitzvot Mevareich Aleihen Oveir LeAsiyatan"? The Berachah would seem to be in vain. Furthermore, the Rama records that women accept Shabbat when lighting candles. If the Mitzvah is fulfilled earlier, it should be forbidden to do Melachah afterward.

Rav Bush responds that all lights that illuminate the home enhance the Mitzvah. The primary fulfillment remains the candles on the table, and a Berachah may be recited on them. He cites the Rama's ruling that two women may light in the same place and each recite a Berachah, since additional light enhances the Mitzvah.

He further argues that Kabbalat Shabbat is tied to the Berachah, not the lighting itself. Thus, performing Melachah after turning on electric lights does not prove lack of intent.

#### The Pri Megadim's Stringency

Even if the Mitzvah was fulfilled, the Pri Megadim (263:3) extends the Kenas to a case where a woman lit fewer candles than usual. According to this, she would still need to add a candle weekly.

However, the Poskim debate whether to follow this stringency. The Bi'ur Halacha rejects extending the Kenas, invoking the principle "Chiddush Hu VeHavu DeLo Losif Alah." Many major authorities do not mention the Pri Megadim's extension, implying it was not widely accepted.

#### Other Rulings

Several contemporary Poskim address this case. Rav Ovadia Yosef (cited by Rav Yaakov Yosef) and Rav Hershel Schachter agree with Rav Bush that no Kenas applies if the house was lit.

Rav Shmuel Wosner disagrees, arguing that forgetting entirely should still trigger the Kenas. Rav Elazar Meir Teitz agrees that electric lights suffice for Shalom Bayit, but requires specific intent for Shabbat; otherwise, the Kenas applies.

#### Conclusion

Yalkut Yosef is even more lenient, ruling that no Kenas applies if the house was lit, regardless of intent or timing. Many Rabbanim follow this approach, including Rav Mordechai Willig. Since the Rama's Kenas is of later origin, they are lenient in its application, especially given the potential embarrassment it can cause.

\*\*\*\*\*  
**THE TANACH STUDY CENTER [www.tanach.org](http://www.tanach.org)**  
*In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag*  
**Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag**  
 \*\*\*\*\*

**PARSHAT TAZRIA / METZORA**

Anyone who understands the opening pasuk of Parshat Acharei Mot immediately realizes that this entire Parsha belongs in Parshat Shmini! Why then do Parshiot Tazria/Metzora 'interrupt' this logical sequence?

In case this sounds a bit complicated, don't worry; we'll begin this week's shiur by first explaining this question. Then we'll use its answer to help us arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the structure and theme of Sefer Vayikra.

**INTRODUCTION**

Recall that the first half of Parshat Shmini included the story of tragic death of Aharon's two sons - Nadav & Avihu (see 10:1-9). Recall as well that Parshat ACHAREI MOT (several chapters later) opens with God's commandment to Moshe & Aharon in the aftermath of that event:

"And God spoke to Moshe and Aharon AFTER THE DEATH of the two sons of Aharon..." (16:1)

Hence, it would have been more logical for the Torah to include this commandment in Parshat Shmini - immediately after the story of their death. [In other words, Vayikra chapter 16 should follow immediately after chapter 10!]

However, we find instead that chapters 11 thru 15, detailing numerous laws concerning various types of "tumah" [spiritual uncleanness], form an 'interruption' to this logical flow.

To explain why, Part One of our shiur will explore the thematic relationship between these laws of "tumah" and the story of Nadav & Avihu's death. In Part Two, we will build an outline that will summarize these laws of "tumah" that will help us appreciate their detail.

**PART ONE - WHAT DID NADAV & AVIHU DO WRONG?**

As you are probably aware, there are numerous opinions concerning what Nadav & Avihu did wrong. The reason for this difference of opinions is simple; the Torah only tells us WHAT they did, but does not explain WHY they were punished. Therefore, each commentator looks for a clue either within that pasuk (see 10:1) or in the 'neighboring' psukim in search of that reason.

[For example, the word "aish zarah" in 10:1 implies that Nadav & Avihu may have sinned by offering the wrong type of fire. Alternately, the 'parshia' that follows discusses laws that forbid the kohanim to become intoxicated (see 10:8-11), thus implying that they may have been drunk. (See Rashi, Ramban, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni, etc.) In fact, each commentary on this pasuk is so convincing that it is truly hard to choose between them.]

However, in contrast to that discussion concerning what specifically Nadav & Avihu did wrong (and why), our shiur will focus instead on the more general connection between this incident and the overall structure (and theme) of Sefer Vayikra.

**FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS**

Even though the Torah does not tell us specifically WHY Nadav & Avihu were punished, the pasuk that describes their sin does provide us with a very general explanation:

"va'yikrvu aish zara - ASHER LO TZIVAH otam" - and they offered a 'foreign fire' that GOD HAD NOT COMMANDED THEM (see 10:1)

However, finding this phrase "asher lo tzivah otam" should not surprise us. In relation to the construction of the Mishkan, we found this phrase repeated numerous times in our study of Parshiot Vayakhel & Pekudei.

[To refresh your memory, just note how "ka'asher tzivah Hashem et Moshe" [As God has commanded Moshe] concludes just about every "parshia" in Parshat Pekudei. See not only 35:29; 36:1; & 36:5 but also 39:1,5,7,21,26,29,31,32,42,43 & 40:16, 19,21,23,25,27,29,32!]

Furthermore, this phrase first appeared at the very introduction of the Mishkan unit that began in Parshat Vayakhel:

"And Moshe said to the entire congregation of Israel [EYDAH] ZEH HA'DAVAR - ASHER TZIVAH HASHEM - This is what GOD HAS COMMANDED saying..." (see 35:1,4, see also 35:1)

Finally, thus far in Sefer Vayikra we have found this same phrase when the Torah describes the story of the Mishkan's dedication. First of all, in the the seven day "miluim" ceremony:

"And Moshe said to the entire EYDAH [gathered at the Ohel Moed:8:3] - ZEH HA'DAVAR - This is what GOD HAS COMMANDED to do..." (Vayikra 8:4-5, see also 8:9,13,17,21,36.)

And in Moshe Rabeinu's opening explanation of the special korbanot that were to be offered on Yom ha'Shmini:

"And Moshe said: ZEH HA'DAVAR - THIS is what GOD HAS COMMANDED that you do [in order] that His KAVOD [Glory] can appear upon you [once again]..." (9:6, see also 9:1-5)

Carefully note how Moshe declares this statement in front of the entire "eydah" [congregation] that has gathered to watch this ceremony. [See 9:5! Note also in 9:3-4 that Moshe explains to the people that these korbanot will 'bring back' the "shchinah".]

In fact, when you review chapter 9, note how the Torah concludes each stage of this special ceremony with this same phrase. [See 9:5,6,7,10,21.]

Therefore, when the Torah uses a very similar phrase to describe the sin of Nadav & Avihu on that day - "va'yikrvu aish zara - ASHER LO TZIVAH otam" (see 10:1), we should expect to find a thematic connection between that sin and this phrase.

To find that connection, we must consider the reason why the Torah uses this phrase so often in its details of the Mishkan's construction.

**EMPHASIZING A CRITICAL POINT**

Recall that Nadav & Avihu's sin took place on the 'eighth day'. Earlier on that day (as the ceremony was about to begin) Moshe had gathered the entire nation to explain the PRECISE details of how the korbanot would be offered on that day.

[Note again, the key phrase: "zeh ha'davar asher tzivah Hashem..." / see 9:4-6.] In fact, Moshe made two very similar remarks before the entire nation before the Mishkan's original construction (Shmot 35:1,4), and before the seven day MILUIM ceremony (see Vayikra 8:1).

Why must Moshe, prior to offering these special korbanot, first explain the details of these procedures to the entire congregation who have gathered to watch?

The Torah appears to be sending a very strong message in regard to the Mishkan. God demands that man must act precisely in accordance to His command - without changing even a minute detail.

## NADAV & AVIHU'S PUNISHMENT

With this background, we can better understand why Nadav & Avihu are punished. On the day of its public dedication - on Yom ha'Shmini - they decide (on their own) to offer KTORET. Note the Torah's description of their sin:

"And Nadav & Avi each took their firepan, put in it fire and added KTORET, and they brought an alien fire in front of God which He HAD NOT COMMANDED THEM [asher lo tzivah]"

Their fire is considered "aish zarah" [alien] simply because God 'did not command them' to offer it. [Note the special emphasis upon the word "lo" according to the "taamei mikra" (cantillation). See also commentary of Chizkuni on 10:1.

Nadav & Avihu may have had the purest intentions, but they made one critical mistake - they did not act according to the precise protocol that God had prescribed for that day. Considering that the entire EYDAH gathered at the Ohel Moed recognize that Nadav & Avihu have strayed from protocol, they must be punished; for the lesson of that day was exactly this point - that in the Mishkan man must meticulously follow every detail of God's command.

[Note, this interpretation does not negate any of the other opinions which suggest that Nadav & Avihu had done something else wrong [such as drinking or disrespect of Moshe, etc.]. It simply allows us to understand the severity their punishment EVEN if they had done nothing 'wrong' at all (other than doing something that God had not commanded). See also commentary of Rashbam on 10:1 in this regard.]

From a thematic perspective, their punishment under these circumstances is quite understandable. Recall the theological dilemma created by a MISHKAN - a physical representation (or symbol) of a transcendental God. Once a physical object is used to represent God, the danger exists that man may treat that object [and then possibly another object] as a god itself. On the other hand, without a physical representation of any sort, it becomes difficult for man to develop any sort of relationship with God. Therefore, God allows a Mishkan - a symbol of His Presence - but at the same time, He must emphasize that He can only be worshiped according to the precise manner "as God had commanded Moshe".

[See also Devarim 4:9-24 for the Torah's discussion of a similar fear that man may choose his own object to represent God [a "tavnit..." / compare Shmot 25:8-9 "v'akmal".]

## THE PROBLEM OF 'GOOD INTENTIONS'

This specific problem of 'following God's command' in relation to the Mishkan takes on extra meaning on Yom ha'Shmini.

Recall our explanation of Aharon's sincere intentions at the incident of "chet ha'egel", i.e. he wanted to provide Bnei Yisrael with a physical symbol of God, which they could worship. [See previous shiur on Ki-tisa.] Despite Aharon's good intentions, his actions led to a disaster. The sin of "chet ha'egel" caused KAVOD HASHEM [God's Glory (= "shchina")], which had appeared to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai, to be taken away (see Shmot 33:1-7).

Due to Moshe's intervention, God finally allowed His SHCHINA to return to the MISHKAN that Bnei Yisrael had built. But when Nadav & Avihu make a mistake (similar to Aharon's sin at chet ha'egel) on the very day of the Mishkan's dedication, they must be punished immediately.

[Not only can this explain why they are so severely punished, it may also help us understand their father's reaction of: "va'YIDOM Aharon" [and Aharon stood silent] (see 10:3).]

Finally, this interpretation can help us understand Moshe's statement to Aharon: "This is what God had spoken -B'KROVEI E'KADESH..." (see 10:3). Recall the parallel that we have discussed many times between Har Sinai and the Mishkan. At Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael AND the Kohanim were forewarned:

"And God told Moshe: Go down and WARN the people that they must not break through [the barrier surrounding] Har

Sinai, lest they gaze at Hashem and perish. The KOHANIM also, who COME NEAR HASHEM, must sanctify themselves ("yitkadashu" - compare "b'krovei akadesh"/10:3), lest God punish them." (Shmot 19:21)

As this inaugural ceremony parallels the events of Har Sinai, God's original warning concerning approaching Har Sinai, even for the KOHANIM, now applies to the Mishkan as well. Therefore, extra caution is necessary, no matter how good one's intentions may be. [See sim]

## BACK TO SEFER VAYIKRA

Now we can return to our original question. In Sefer Vayikra, the story of the sin of Nadav & Avihu (chapter 10) introduces an entire set of laws that discuss improper entry into the Mishkan (chapters 11->15). Then, immediately after this tragic event, the Sefer discusses the various laws of "tumah v'tahara", which regulate who is permitted and who is forbidden to enter the Mishkan. Only after the completion of this section discussing who can enter the Mishkan, does Sefer Vayikra return (in chapter 16) to God's command to Aharon concerning how he himself can properly enter the holiest sanctum of the Mikdash (on Yom Kippur).

In Part Two, we discuss the content of this special unit of mitzvot from chapter 11->15.

## PART II

### WHO CAN ENTER THE MISHKAN / TUMAH & TAHARA

#### INTRODUCTION

We often find ourselves lost in the maze of complicated laws concerning "tumah" and "tahara" which the Torah details in Parshiot TAZRIA & METZORA. Even though it is not easy to understand the reasoning for these laws, the internal structure of these Parshiot is quite easy to follow.

In Part II, we outline the flow of parshiot from Parshat Shmini through Metzora and attempt to explain why they are located specifically in this section of Sefer Vayikra.

#### THE UNIT

As the following table shows, each of these five chapters deals with a topic related in one form or manner to "tumah" (spiritual uncleanness).

#### CHAPTER "TUMAH" CAUSED BY:

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 11 | eating or touching dead animals           |
| 12 | the birth of a child                      |
| 13 | a "tzaraat" on a person's skin or garment |
| 14 | a "tzaraat" in a house                    |
| 15 | various emissions from the human body     |

Not only do these parshiot discuss how one contracts these various types of TUMAH, they also explain how one can cleanse himself from these TUMOT, i.e. how he becomes TAHOR. For the simplest type of TUMAH, one need only wash his clothing and wait until sundown (see 11:27-28,32,40). For more severe types of TUMAH, to become TAHOR one must first wait seven days and then bring a set of special korbanot.

This entire unit follows a very logical progression. It begins with the least severe type of TUMAH, known as "tumah erev" - one day TUMAH (lit. until the evening), and then continues with the more severe type of TUMAH, known as "tumah shiva", seven day TUMAH. Within each category, the Torah first explains how one contracts each type of TUMAH, then it explains the how he becomes TAHOR from it.

The following OUTLINE summarizes this structure. Note how each section of the outline concludes with a pasuk that begins with "zot torat...":

## VAYIKRA - CHAPTERS 11 -> 15

- I. ONE DAY TUMAH - 11:1-47 / "v'tamey ad ha'erev"  
[known as "tumat erev" (or "tumah kala")]  
Person is TAMEY until nightfall/ see 11:24,25,27,31,32,39]  
because he ate, touched, or carried the dead carcass of:  
A. (11:1-28) forbidden animals and fowl  
B. (29-38) one of the eight "shrutzim" (swarming creatures)  
C. (39-40) permitted animals that died without "shchita"  
D. (41-43) other creeping or swarming creatures.  
TAHARA for the above - washing one's clothes/ 11:28,32,40]  
FINALE psukim (11:44-47)  
...ZOT TORAT HA'BHAYMA etc.

- II. SEVEN DAY TUMAH - 12:1-15:33 ("tumah chamurah")  
A. TUMAT YOLEDET - a mother who gave birth (12:1-8)  
1. for a boy : 7+33=40  
2. for a girl : 14+66=80

TAHARA - korban chatat & olah  
...ZOT TORAT HA'YOLEDET etc.

- B. TZARAAT HA'ADAM  
TUMAH / based on inspection by the kohen  
1. on one's body / 13:1-46  
2. on one's "beged" (garment) /13:47-59  
TAHARA / 14:1-32  
1. special sprinkling, then count 7 days  
2. special korban on eighth day  
...ZOT TORAT ASHER BO NEGA TZARAAT etc.

- C. TZARAAT HA'BAYIT / 14:33-53  
TUMAH / based on inspection by kohen  
1. the stones of the house itself (14:33-45)  
2. secondary "tumah" (14:46-47) for one who:  
a. enters the house  
b. sleeps in the house  
c. eats in the house  
TAHARA - a special sprinkling on the house (14:48-53)  
summary psukim for all types of TZARAAT (14:54-57)  
...ZOT HA'TORAH L'CHOL NEGA HA'TZRAAT  
... ZOT TORAT HA'TZARAAT.

- D. EMISSIONS FROM THE BODY (chapter 15)  
1. MALE - TUMAT ZAV - an abnormal emission of "zera"  
a. he himself (15:1-4) - 7 days  
b. secondary "tumah" / 1 day (15:5-12)  
for one who either touches what the ZAV is sitting on, or  
sits on an item that the ZAV sits, and other misc. cases.  
TAHARA (15:13-15)  
waiting 7 days, then washing with "mayim chayim"  
on 8th day a special korban  
2. MALE - TUMAT KERI - a normal emission (15:16-18)  
one day "tumah" (until evening)  
requires washing clothing.  
3. FEMALE - TUMAT NIDA - a normal flow (15:19-24)  
a. she herself - seven days  
b. secondary "tumah" - one day  
for person or items that she touches  
4. FEMALE - TUMAT ZAVA - an abnormal flow (15:25-30)  
a. she herself and what she sits on - 7 days  
b. secondary "tumah" for someone who touches her or  
something which she is sitting on.  
TAHARA -  
waiting seven days...  
on 8th day a special korban  
A FINALE and summary psukim (15:31-33)  
...ZOT TORAT HA'ZAV etc.

## ABOUT THE OUTLINE

I recommend that you review this outline as you study the Parsha. Note that even though the details are very complicated, the overall structure is actually quite simple.

Note also how the Torah summarizes each section with a phrase beginning with ZOT TORAT... - this is the procedure (or ritual) for... [See the previous shiur on Parshat Tzav/Parah in which we discussed the meaning of the word TORAH in Sefer Vayikra.] The repetition of key phrases such as these is often helpful towards identifying the internal structure of parshiot in Chumash.

Our division of the outline into TWO sections, ONE-DAY tumah and SEVEN-DAY tumah may at first appear to be a bit misleading for we also find many cases of one day tumah in the second section. However, the cases of one-day TUMAH in the second section are quite different for they are CAUSED by a person who had first become TAMEY for seven days. Therefore, we have defined them as 'secondary' TUMAH in that section.

[TUMAT KERI (15:16-18) may be another exception since it is an independent one-day TUMAH, however it could be considered a sub-category within the overall framework of TUMAT ZAV.]

[See also further iyun section for a discussion why the one-day TUMAH section includes KASHRUT laws.]

## WHY THE INTERRUPTION?

Now that we have established that chapters 11->15 form a distinct unit, which discusses the laws of TUMAH & TAHARA; we can return to our original question - Why does this unit interrupt the natural flow from Parshat Shmini (chapter 10) to Parshat Acharei Mot (chapter 16)?

The concluding psukim of this unit can provide us with a possible explanation.

As we have noted in our outline, this entire unit contains an important FINALE pasuk:

"V'HIZARTEM ET BNEI YISRAEL M'TUMATAM... And you shall put Bnei Yisrael on guard [JPS - see further iyun regarding translation of "vhizartem"] against their TUMAH, LEST THEY DIE through their TUMAH by defiling My MISHKAN which is among them." (see 15:31)

This pasuk connects the laws of TUMAH & TAHARA to the laws of the Mishkan. Bnei Yisrael must be careful that should they become TAMEY, they must not ENTER the Mishkan. In fact, the primary consequence for one who has become TAMEY is the prohibition that he cannot enter the MIKDASH complex. There is no prohibition against becoming TAMEY, rather only a prohibition against entering the Mishkan should he be TAMEY.

Hence, the entire TAHARA process as well is only necessary for one who wishes to enter the Mishkan. If there is no Mishkan, one can remain TAMEY his entire life with no other consequence (see further iyun section).

With this background, we can suggest a common theme for the first 16 chapters of Sefer Vayikra - the ability of Bnei Yisrael to enter the Mishkan, to come closer to God.

Let's explain:

The first section of Sefer Vayikra, chapters 1->7, explains HOW and WHEN the individual can bring a korban and HOW they are offered by the kohen. The next section, chapters 8->10, records the special Mishkan dedication ceremony, which prepared Bnei Yisrael and the Kohanim for using and working in the Mishkan. As this ceremony concluded with the death of Nadav & Avihu for improper entry into the Mishkan (when offering the "ktoret zara"), Sefer Vayikra continues with an entire set of commandments concerning TUMAH & TAHARA, chapters 11->15, which regulate who can and cannot ENTER THE MISHKAN. This unit ends with laws of Yom Kippur, which describe the procedure of how the "kohen gadol" (high

priest) can enter the most sacred domain of the Mishkan - the Kodesh K'doshim.

Even though these laws of TUMAH & TAHARA may have been given to Moshe at an earlier or later time, once again, we find that Sefer Vayikra prefers thematic continuity over chronological order (see shiur on Parshat Tzav). First, the Sefer discusses who cannot enter the Mishkan. Then it explains who can enter its most sacred domain.

### ZEHIRUT - BEING CAREFUL

Up until this point, we have discussed the technical aspects of the structure of this unit in Parshiot Shmini, Tazria & Metzora. Is there any significance to these laws of TUMAH & TAHARA today as well?

The simplest explanation is based on our parallel between the Mishkan and Har Sinai. Just as Bnei Yisrael's encounter with God at Har Sinai required special preparation, so too man's encounter with God in the Mishkan. It would not be proper for man just to 'hop on in' whenever he feels like entering the Mishkan. Instead, each time an individual plans to offer a korban or enter the Mishkan for any other reason, he must prepare himself by making sure not to come in contact with anything which would make him TAMEY. Should for any reason he become TAMEY, he must wash his clothes and wait until the next day. Should he himself contract a major type of TUMAH such as TZARAAT or ZAV, then he must wait at least seven days and undergo a special ritual which will make him TAHOR.

All of these complicated laws cause the man who wishes to visit the Mishkan to be very careful and constantly aware of everything he touches, or carries, etc. during the entire week prior to his visit, thus enhancing his spiritual readiness for entering the Mishkan.

Today, even without a Mishkan, man must still make every effort to find God's Presence, even though it is hidden. Therefore, man's state of constant awareness and caution concerning everything that he says and does remains a primary means by which man can come closer to God, even though no Bet Ha'Mikdash exists.

An important thought to keep in mind as we prepare ourselves during the seven weeks of Sefirat ha'Omer in preparation for our commemoration of Ma'amad Har Sinai on Shavuot.

shabbat shalom  
menachem

### FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In relation to the translation of the word "v'hizartem et Bnei Yisrael..." (15:31), see Ibn Ezra. He explains that the word does not stem from "azhara"=warning, but rather from the word "nazir", to separate oneself ["zarut"]. Then "nun" simply falls which is noted by the dagesh in the "zayin". See Ibn Ezra inside!

B. Since this section of chapters 11->15 discuss various laws of TUMAH & TAHARA, one would expect it to include the laws of TUMAT MEYT (caused by touching a dead person). Instead, the Torah records these laws in Parshat Chukat, Bamidbar chapter 19. It appears as though that parsha was 'spliced' from this unit and 'transferred' to Sefer Bamidbar. This parsha is one of many parshiot in Sefer Bamidbar which would appear to 'belong' in Sefer Vayikra instead. ly"n, we will explain the reason for this in our shiurim on Sefer Bamidbar - "v'akmal".

C. At first glance, the section in our unit which discusses 'one-day' TUMAH (chapter 11) appears to be discussing "kashrut" (dietary laws) more than TUMAH, for it details which animals are permitted or forbidden to be eaten. However, the dietary laws which are mentioned here because one becomes TAMEY should he eat the meat of an animal which is TAMEY.

To prove this, simply compare this parsha to the dietary laws in Parshat Re'ay (see Dvarim 14:1-21). There we find only dietary laws and not laws of TUMAH & TAHARA. Therefore, laws such as "basar v'chalav" are mentioned in that parsha, while the laws of TUMAH are not!

D. These laws which discuss who can and cannot enter the Mikdash are sometimes referred to as HILCHOT BIYAT MIKDASH (see Rambam Sefer Avodah). Obviously, these laws apply only when a Mikdash exists, as there is no other consequence of 'becoming tamey' other than limited entry to areas containing shchinah.

Nonetheless, there are several circumstances when it is still necessary to know these laws. For example, entering HAR HA'BAYIT even when there is not Mikdash requires that one not be TAMEY. These laws also relate to eating TRUMOT & MAASROT.

E. See 11:44-45

"...v'hitkadishtem, v'yehiytem KDOSHIM, ki KADOSH ani"  
v'lo t'TAMU et nafshoteichem...."  
"ki ani Hashem ha'maale etchem m'erezt mitzrayim,  
l'hiyot l'chem l'Elokim, v'heyitem KDOSHIM ..."  
"... l'havdil bein ha'tamey u'bein ha'tahor..."

This finale of the section explaining 'one-day' TUMAH connects the theme of Sefer Shmot, that Hashem took us out Egypt in order that we become His nation, to the laws of "tumah & tahara". To become God's nation, we must be like Him. Just as He is "kadosh" (set aside, different), we must also be "kadosh".

Man's spirituality begins with his recognition that he is different than animal. Although man and animal are similar in many ways, man must realize that he was set aside by God for a higher purpose. God blessed man with special qualities in order that he fulfill that purpose. [See Rambam in Moreh Nvuchim I.1 regarding the definition of tzelem elokim. It is not by coincidence that the Rambam begins Moreh Nvuchim with this concept.]

These laws of "tumot ochlim" teach Am Yisrael that they must differentiate between man and animal, and between different types of animals. By doing so, man will learn to differentiate between divine and mundane, between "tamey & tahor", and finally between good and bad, right and wrong etc.

D. In previous shiurim, we explained how the cycles of seven found in Chumash relate to our need to recognize the hand of God behind nature. Why do you think that we also find cycles of seven in the laws of TZARAAT, ZAV, and ZAVA that appear to be the exact opposite, that is abnormalities in nature?

---

## PARSHAT TAZRIA - From 7 to 8 [& for Shmini Atzeret]

What is so special about the number 'eight' in Chumash? Is it only coincidental that:

- \* In Sefer Breishit - specifically the 'eighth day' is chosen for Brit Milah;
- \* In Parshat Shmini - specifically the 'eighth day' is chosen for the dedication of the Mishkan;
- \* In Parshat Metzora - the 'eighth day' is chosen for the day on which the cleansed Metzora, Zav, and Zavah bring their special korbanot;
- \* In Parshat Emor - the final holiday is "SHMINI atzeret" - the 'eighth day' of Succot!

In the following shiur, we attempt to explain why the number eight is so special, based on the Biblical significance of the number seven.

### INTRODUCTION

In previous shiurim we have discussed the special relationship between the Number SEVEN and 'nature', especially in regard to the "shalosh regalim" [the three pilgrimage holidays]. For example, in our shiur our Parshat Emor we noted that is not by chance that the Torah commands us to:

- \* Celebrate specifically SEVEN days of Chag Ha'matzot in the **spring**; and then -
- \* To count SEVEN weeks until the **grain harvest** holiday of Shavuot; and finally -
- \* To celebrate our **fruit harvest** during the SEVEN days of Succot.

The fact that each of these holidays include either seven days or seven weeks suggests a connection between the number seven and agriculture. By emphasizing SEVEN in relation to these agricultural holidays, the Torah highlights our need to recognize that the powers of nature are indeed God's creation, and we must thank Him accordingly.

Similarly, our shiur on Parshat Breishit discussed how the Torah presents of the story of Creation as taking place in SEVEN days – to emphasize how the very creation of 'nature' itself was a willful act of the One God - and not the result of conflicts among a pantheon of many gods, each exerting its power over a certain part of nature.

In the following shiur, we return to Sefer Breishit in search of the biblical significance of the number 'eight', to show how and why it should relate to those 'seven' days of Creation.

#### EIGHT & BRIT MILAH

In some of the examples quoted above from Sefer Vayikra, 'eight' appears to be significant simply because it follows a sequence of 'seven' days. For example:

- \* "Yom Ha'shmini" follows the SEVEN days of the "miluim";
- \* The korbanot on the eighth day of the Metzora and Zav follow their minimum SEVEN day "tahara" period;
- \* "Shmini Atzeret" follows the SEVEN days of Succot.

However, when God first commanded Avraham Avinu that "brit milah" must be performed on the 'eighth day' after a child's birth (see Breishit 17:12) - there is no apparent reason why God chose specifically the 'eighth day'. Certainly, it had nothing to do with a prior period of 'seven days' (as did the other examples of a special 'eighth day' mentioned above).

[Even though we are told in Parshat Tazria that the mother is "tamey" (spiritually unclean) for the first seven days after her son's birth (see Vayikra 12:2-5), there does not appear to be any logical connection between these seven days and the commandment to perform "milah" on the eighth day that was first given way back in Sefer Breishit. In fact, it seems quite the opposite - that because brit milah needs to be performed on the eighth day, her 'tumah' period is 'truncated' from 14 days to seven days. ]

In the following shiur, we re-examine this covenant between God and Avraham Avinu [17:1-11/ better known as "brit milah"] in the 'wider' context of Sefer Breishit - to uncover a thematic connection between the 'eighth day' and the 'seven days' of Creation. [Hopefully, it will help us understand not only why "milah" is on the 'eighth day', but also why the holiday of "Shmini Atzeret" is so important.]

As you most probably recall, the Torah uses several names to describe God (e.g. Elokim, Havaya, kel-shaddai, etc.). However, when the narrative of "brit milah" begins in chapter 17, something very peculiar takes place, as God introduces Himself to Avraham Avinu for the first time as "kel-shaddai" - after which the Torah consistently refers to God as "Elokim" (until the end of that chapter).

To appreciate the thematic importance of this observation, we must first undertake a quick review of all the previous instances in Sefer Breishit when God spoke to man, paying special attention to when the Torah uses "shem Elokim".

#### IN WHAT 'NAME' DOES GOD SPEAK TO MAN?

In our shiur on Parshat Breishit, we explained how Chumash presents two parallel stories of God's creation of the universe:

- 1) "b'shem ELOKIM" (1:1 -2:4) - [or 'perek aleph'] which focused on God's creation of NATURE, i.e. a structured universe, in SEVEN days.
- 2) "b'shem HAVAYA" (2:5-4:26) - [or 'perek bet'] which focused on God's special relationship with Man, i.e. the creation of Gan Eden, and man's banishment from that environment after he sinned.

Without going into the complex details and deeper meaning of this 'double presentation', we will simply posit that God's relationship with man develops along the lines of each of these two perspectives, as each of these divine Name will reflect a different perspective of the developing relationship between man and God.

For example, in perek aleph, God - b'shem Elokim - blesses man that he be fruitful & multiply, master the earth and rule over all other living creatures (see 1:26-28). In contrast to this perspective of man as ruler over God's Creations, in perek bet - b'shem Havaya -man is created in order to become God's servant, whose job is to tend and watch over His Garden (see 2:15-17).

This 'double perspective' is found once again in the Torah's account of the Flood, as God's decision to destroy the generation of the Flood (due to their sinful behavior) is presented according to both of these perspectives:

- 1) b'shem Elokim - see 6:9-6:22.
- 2) b'shem Havaya - see 6:5-8 & 7:1-5.

Likewise, in the aftermath of the MABUL, God redefines His relationship with man, again from both perspectives:

- 1) b'shem Elokim - see 9:1-17
- 2) b'shem Havaya - see 8:18-21

After the flood, the Torah describes ["b'shem Elokim"] how the children of Noach multiply and disperse into seventy nations (10:1-32), but immediately afterwards details God's punishment of the builders of the Tower of Babel while referring to God using "shem Havaya" (see 11:1-10).

At this point in Chumash (i.e. at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha) this pattern (of 'double presentation') seems to end - for the Torah uses exclusively "shem Havaya" as it describes all the conversations between God and Avraham Avinu, from chapter 12 thru chapter 16. The Torah's exclusive use of "shem Havaya" to describe these encounters is thematically consistent with our assertion that God's Name of "Havaya" relates to the special relationship between man and God - where man is expected to act as a servant of God.

For example, God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation is described b'shem Havaya (see 12:1-9); so too His re-iteration of that promise after Lot's departure (see 13:14-17).

Similarly, when God formalizes that promise into a covenant in "brit bein ha'tarim" (see 15:1-20) - again we find the Torah's employs "shem Havaya" in its description of God.

For some reason, this exclusive (and logical) use of "shem Havaya" in the Torah's description of God's relationship with Avraham Avinu changes in chapter seventeen - when the Torah

first uses "shem Elokim" to describe how God speaks to Avraham Avinu at "brit milah"!

To understand the reason for this sudden change, let's take a closer look at how that chapter begins, noticing how God first introduces Himself as "kel sha-dai" before speaking to him b'shem ELOKIM:

"When Avram was ninety-nine years, God [HAVAYA] appeared to Avram and said to him: "ANI KEL SHA-DAI", walk before Me and be blameless. And I will establish My COVENANT between Me and you... Avram fell on his face, and God [ELOKIM] spoke to him saying... This is my COVENANT with you..." (17:1-4)

As you study these psukim, and the ones that follow, note how God (b'shem Elokim):

- a) changes Avram's name to Avraham;
- b) blesses him that he will multiply ("pru u'rvu");
- c) promises that he will become a great nation;
- d) promises him and his future generations Eretz Canaan;
- e) promises to be his God ("le'hiyot l'cha l'ELOKIM");
- f) commands him to circumcise his male children, etc.

In addition to these details in these psukim, pay attention as well to their style - as they share some very interesting similarities to the only two earlier instances where Chumash uses "shem Elokim" to describe God speaking to man:

- (I) After the creation of man on the sixth day (1:27-30);
- (II) After the Flood (see 9:1-17).

To verify this, review those two sets of psukim, noting the parallels to the narrative of "brit milah":

- I) On the sixth day, after man is created b'tzelem ELOKIM, God (b'shem ELOKIM) blesses him that he should:
  - a) be fruitful and multiply ("pru u'rvu");
  - b) be master and ruler of the living kingdom;
  - c) eat from the plants and fruit of the trees.
- II) Some ten generations later, after the Flood, God (b'shem ELOKIM) blesses Noach and his children in a very similar fashion (9:1-7), including:
  - a) to be fruitful and multiply ("pru u'rvu");
  - b) to be master of the living kingdom;
  - c) permission to eat living creatures (not only plants);

However, the most striking parallel to "brit milah" is found in the special covenant that God ["b'shem Elokim"] makes with Noach immediately after these blessings as described in 9:8-12:  
"vhakimoti et briti itchem... [9:11/ compare 17:7-8]

"va'yomer Elokim, zot ot ha'brit..." [19:12/ compare 17:9-10]

This covenant, better known as "brit ha'keshet" (the rainbow covenant), reflects the establishment of a special relationship between God and mankind, as God promises that He will never again bring about the total destruction of His Creation. [See 9:11-15 / see also Ramban on 6:18, especially his final explanation of the word "brit", based on the word "briya"!]

It is rather amazing that the next time that God speaks to man b'shem Elokim is only some ten generations later - at Brit Milah, when He challenges Avraham Avinu to accept yet another covenant. Note the striking textual similarities between these two covenants, i.e. "brit Milah" and "brit ha'keshet":

- a) to be fruitful and multiply 9:1 / 17:2,6;
  - c) "v'hakimoti et briti..." 9:11 / 17:7;
  - d) "ha'aterz" // "eretz canaan" 9:13,16,17 / 17:8
  - e) "ot brit": "ha'milah // ha'keshet" 9:13,17 / 17:12;
- [to verify this, open your Tanach & compare them yourself]

However, in addition to these similarities, in "brit Milah" we find an additional, yet very important promise - "li'hiyot lachem l'Elokim" [to be a God for you] - reflecting a much CLOSER relationship with God. In fact, this key phrase is repeated twice, for it emphasizes and defines the purpose of Brit Milah (read 17:7-8 carefully!).

### ONE STEP 'ABOVE' NATURE

With this background, we can suggest a reason for why God [b'shem Elokim] commands Avraham to perform "brit milah" specifically on the eighth day.

Note the progression that has emerged as we followed God's relationship with man, from the perspective of 'shem Elokim':  
STAGE 1) The Creation of NATURE in SEVEN days (1:1-2:4);  
STAGE 2) The covenant with Noach after the Flood (9:1-17);  
STAGE 3) The "Brit Milah" covenant with Avraham Avinu to be performed on the EIGHTH day (17:1-14).

One could suggest that circumcision on the EIGHTH day relates to this elevation of man's spiritual level, ONE step above the level of his original creation in SEVEN days.

Let's explain this statement, based on the three stages of this progression b'shem Elokim:

(1) During the first seven days, God brought the universe to a stage of development where it appears to 'take care of itself'. Be it vegetation, animal, or man, all species of life secure their existence by their ability to reproduce; they become fruitful and multiply (e.g. "zo'ray'ah zerah", "zachar u'nekeyvah", "pru u'rvu", etc.). Man's mastery of this creation, his desire to conquer and his ability to harness it, are all part of this phenomenon that we call NATURE. The first chapter of Breishit teaches us that [what we refer to as] nature, did not just happen by chance, rather it was a willful act of God. [By resting on Shabbat, once every seven days, we remind ourselves of this point.]

(2) After the "mabul", God (b'shem Elokim) 'starts over' by re-establishing His relationship with mankind in a covenant with Noach, known as "brit ha'keshet". This covenant reflects a relationship very similar to that in God's original creation in seven days, with some 'minor' changes: Man remains master of His universe (9:2), with a 'small change' in his diet (9:3-5), and a commandment that it is forbidden to murder a fellow human (9:6-7). However, the basic laws of nature remain the same (see 9:8).

(3) Up until Brit Milah, man's relationship with God b'shem Elokim remained distant. Although Man was the pinnacle of God's creation with certain minimal expectations of moral behavior, he was basically just part of nature. Man was given power; he acted like God (b'tzelem Elokim), but was not CLOSE to Him. At Brit Milah, Avraham is raised to a higher level. He and his offspring are chosen to represent God as His special nation, and towards that purpose, they are awarded a special relationship with God, as they are now destined to represent Him, i.e. -"li'hiyot lachem l'Elokim".

Then, as an "ot" [a sign] to symbolize this relationship, they are commanded to circumcise their children on the 'eighth day'. Hence, "milah" specifically on the EIGHTH day may reflect this additional level in the creation process, which first took place in SEVEN days. [What the Maharal refers to as "m'al ha'teva - above nature!]

In other words, the eighth day can be understood as representative of one final stage of the creation process. Just as the seven days of Creation - b'shem Elokim] - included a progression from "domem" (the inanimate objects / i.e. "shmayim v'aretz"); to "tzomayach" (vegetation); to "chai" (the animal kingdom); to "adam" (man) - the 'eighth day' reflects how man has been elevated to a higher level in his relationship with God.

To elevate Creation to a higher awareness of God's existence, a special covenant is made with the offspring of Avraham, and we remind ourselves of this covenant specifically by performing "brit Milah" on the eighth day after a child's birth.

[This interpretation could reflect a statement made by Reish Lakish, explaining the meaning of God's name "kel sha-dai" which is first introduced at Brit Milah (see 17:1-2):

What's the meaning of "ani kel-sha'dai"? God said: I am the One who said to the world "dai" - enough, or stop]."

(see Yalkut Shimoni siman 81, Chagiga 12a)

[See also commentary of the "Torah Tmima" on this pasuk.]

This explanation may help us understand the complexity in the opening lines of the Brit Milah narrative: God, b'shem Havaya - the Name of God which Avraham is familiar with up until this point - informs Avraham that He is "kel sha-dai", the God who had 'stopped' His process of creation after seven days (17:1-2). Now, b'shem Elokim, the Name of God that orchestrated the creation in seven days, intervenes yet one more time. He establishes a covenant with Avraham, to command him with the mitzvah of "brit milah", to raise him ONE level higher, i.e. closer to God.

Thus, God's commandment that we perform Brit Milah on the eighth day is not incidental. Rather, it reflects the very nature of our special relationship with God. In fact, one could suggest that God's relationship with His nation now becomes part of 'the nature of the universe'. Just as the sun will always rise and set, so too, Am Yisrael will always be His nation to represent him (see Yirmiyahu 33:19-26); as reflected by the Torah's use of "shem Elokim".:

With this background, let's return to the various examples of this '7 - 8' relationship in Sefer Vayikra, as "brit milah" on the eighth day was only one example.

#### **SEVEN DAYS "MILUIM" / "YOM HA'SHMINI":**

As explained in our shiur on Parshat Shmini, the seven days necessary to dedicate the Mishkan reflect the parallel between Bnei Yisrael's construction of the Mishkan to serve God, to God's creation of nature in seven days, to serve Him. [See Tehillim 104 - "borchi nafshi...!"]

Then, on the 'eighth day' ["yom ha'shmini"], God commands Bnei Yisrael to offer a special set of korbanot - in anticipation of His "shchinah" that will descend upon the Mishkan - reflecting the return of God's presence. In this manner, the Mishkan now becomes the focal point for the development of the special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael, just as "brit milah" on the eighth day was a sign of that special covenant.

#### **SEVEN DAYS "TAHARA" / EIGHTH DAY "KORBANOT"**

(Metzora, Zav, Zava):

Different types of "tumah" are caused by some abnormal behavior of the body. Seven days of "tahara" are required to return the "tamei" person back to the 'camp' - to his normal existence, his natural habitat. Then on the eighth day, he must bring a special korban to allow his entry into the Mishkan.

[Note the parallel between this process, and its korbanot, to that of the kohanim during the seven-day miluim and Yom ha'Shmini.]

#### **SEVEN DAYS OF SUCCOT / SHMINI ATZERET:**

As agriculture and nature go hand in hand, all of the agricultural holidays follow cycles of seven (see Vayikra chapter 23). In the spring (chag ha'aviv), as the grain harvest begins, we bring "korban ha'omer" and celebrate chag ha'matzot for SEVEN days. Then we count SEVEN WEEKS until the completion of the wheat harvest, bring "korban shte ha'lechem", and celebrate chag ha'SHAVUOT. On succot, "chag ha'asif", at the end of the agricultural year ("b'tzeit ha'shana /see Shmot 23:16), we thank God for our fruit harvest by celebrating for seven days and bringing the "arba minim" to the Mikdash.

At the very end of this cycle of agricultural holidays, we add SHMINI ATZERET, a special gathering with no special agricultural mitzvah. It is simply a time to stop and reflect on the holiday season and year that has passed. On this 'eighth day', we focus on the special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael.

This special relationship between God and Bnei Yisrael that began with Brit Milah, reaches its fullest expression with Matan Torah with Brit Sinai.

Based on this interpretation, it is understandable why Chazal chose this holiday to celebrate as SIMCHAT TORAH, and to conclude on this day the yearly 'cycle' of reading the Torah.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

=====

#### **FOR FURTHER IYUN**

A. In what way could Shavuot be considered the "eighth", after seven cycles of seven. Compare this to the din of the Yovel year in parshat B'har. Why do you think that Chazal refer to Shavuot as "chag ha'atzeret". In what way is it similar to "Shmini Atzeret".

B. Based on the above shiur, why do you think that prior to Brit Milah, God changes both Avraham's and Sarah's names by adding a "hey"? Relate your answer to Hashem's name and His introduction in 17:1-4.

C. Based on the parallels between creation and brit milah, why do you think God chose to make the "ot" of this covenant on the part of the body which performs "pru u'rvu".

Explain why we thank God in birchat ha'mazon for the "aretz", then "britcha asher chatamta bi'bsareinu", and then toratcha sh'limad'tanu"

D. Note in Sefer Yirmiyahu that even the Creation itself is considered a covenant: see 33:25-26, and relate these psukim to the above shiur.

E. Relate the above shiur to the minhag of "sheva brachot" at a wedding, and the seven days of mourning after death.

F. See Rambam Hilchot M'lachim chapter nine [the laws concerning the SEVEN mitzvot of Bnei Noach]. Relate this Rambam to the above shiur.

# Parshas Tazria/Metzora: Jewish Statehood (I)

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

## I. TZARA'AT HABAYIT

After presenting the various laws dealing with Tzara'at (scale diseases) and the purification rituals which accompany them, the Torah presents the laws of Tzara'at haBayit (scale diseases on the walls of houses):

And Hashem spoke to Mosheh and to Aharon, saying, When you come to the land of K'na'an, which I give to you for a possession, and I put the disease of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession; And he who owns the house shall come and tell the Kohen, saying, It seems to me there is a disease in the house; Then the Kohen shall command that they empty the house, before the Kohen goes into it to see the disease... And the Kohen shall come again the seventh day, and shall look; and, behold, if the disease has spread over the walls of the house; Then the Kohen shall command that they take away the stones in which the disease is, and they shall throw them into an unclean place outside the city; And he shall cause the house to be scraped inside around, and they shall pour out the dust that they scraped outside the city into an unclean place; And they shall take other stones, and put them in the place of those stones; and he shall take other mortar, and shall plaster the house. And if the disease comes again, and break out in the house, after he has taken away the stones, and after he has scraped the house, and after it is plastered; Then the Kohen shall come and look, and, behold, if the disease has spread in the house, it is a malignant Tzara'at in the house; it is unclean. And he shall break down the house, its stones, and its timber, and all the mortar of the house; and he shall carry them out of the city into an unclean place... This is the Torah for all kinds of Tzara'at, and patch, and for the leprosy of a garment, and of a house, and for a swelling, and for a scab, and for a bright spot; to teach when it is unclean, and when it is clean; this is the Torah of Tzara'at. (Vayyikra 14:33-57)

The first statement which strikes any student about this Parashah is that, unlike the Torah of Tzara'at presented relating to persons and clothes (chapter 13), the Tzara'at haBayit seems to be a "promise", rather than a contingency (When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a swelling, a scab, or bright spot, and it is on the skin of his flesh like the disease of Tzara'at; then he shall be brought to Aharon haKohen...).

The Midrash (cited, with variations, by Rashi at 14:34) explains the "promise" as follows:

R. Hiyya taught: Was this a harbinger for them, to tell them that they would have plagues in their houses? R. Shim'on bar Yohai taught: Once the K'na'anim heard that Yisra'el are coming to war against them, they hid their money in their homes and fields. HaKadosh Barukh Hu said: I promised their fathers that I would bring them into a Land filled with all manners of good, as it says: And houses full of all good things; what did haKadosh Barukh Hu do? He causes plagues to come into the [Yisra'eli's] house, whereupon he razes it, finding a treasure there. (Vayyikra Rabbah 17:6)

There is something a bit disconcerting about this explanation: If God's intent was merely to expose the K'na'ani's hidden treasure to His people, thus fulfilling the promise of bringing us to a Land of houses full of all good things, why the need for a scaly plague in the house? Why not simply command us to destroy the houses, or to remove the stones etc. in order to find the treasures? (See Hizkuni at 14:34; in a diametrically opposite perspective of that suggested by the Midrash, he associates the command to destroy these houses with the command to uproot pagan worship sites. To wit, God is showing us where the "secret" worship sites are and helping us to uproot them by bringing a scabrous plague on those houses.)

I'd like to ask two further questions on this Parashah:

2) What is the rationale behind the sequence of Tzara'at presented in the Torah: personal scale-disease, Tzara'at haBegeg (scale disease on clothes) and finally Tzara'at haBayit?

3) Why must the owner of the house turn to the Kohen for help in ferreting out the Tzara'at of the house (or, for that matter, of his person or his clothes)?

Since the direction we will adopt in responding to these questions relates both to the unique nature of Eretz Yisra'el and the special demands of Jewish Statehood, we will take a long detour and examine some of the more recent developments (the last couple of centuries worth) in the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over Eretz Yisra'el. Although this essay will cover three Mikra postings, each issue will focus on a separate component of the issue as it relates to that week's

Parashah (or Parashiot); those questions will be “provisionally” answered at the end of each issue, with a summary of all of the points in the final installment.

## II. FROM MOURNING TO CELEBRATION

The season between Pesach and Lag b’Omer has, of late, become a time not only for celebration (in some circles), but also of reflection and commemoration (also, sadly, only in some circles – more on this anon). Since the modern state of Israel was declared on that historic Erev Shabbat of May 15, 1948, the twinned days of Yom haZikaron (Israel Memorial Day – Iyyar 4) and Yom ha’Atzma’ut (Iyyar 5) have been the occasion for many intense feelings among the citizens of our State. Heart-wrenching visits to military cemeteries and moments in silence throughout the country mark the former; while great celebrations involving communal dancing and singing highlight the latter – along with appropriate national ceremonies to accompany each day.

A significant segment of the religious population has fully participated in the “new rituals” associated with each of these commemorative days – along with enhancing each of them with Halakhically-oriented “old rituals” to express, more traditionally, the great and deep feelings which each of these monumental days evokes.

I would like to address two issues in this essay which relate, very directly, to the tone of these commemorative days as we prepare to move into our second half-century of Statehood.

First of all, as noted above, it is only a segment of the Torah-committed population which identifies with (and participates in) these national celebrations. It is worth our while to investigate why the “Torah world” has not fully embraced the opportunity to mark these days in a significant manner. This question itself will be dealt with in two separate – yet interdependent – studies. Why does a significant plurality (if not outright majority) of the “Shomer Shabbat” community in Israel virtually ignore the significance of these days? In responding to this question, we will see that there is no one answer which accurately reflects the Hashkafah of the many schools of thought which are, by dint of their non-celebration, grouped together in the eyes of the Israeli public (religious as well as secular). Independently, we may wish to ask why so much of the Orthodox community outside of Israel (especially in North America) allow these two days to go by without so much as a mention? To so many members of the religious community (including a not-insignificant portion of our readership), this question is a non-starter. We will investigate why this is the case further on, along with suggesting why the question, at the very least, needs to be asked, specifically within those communities.

The second issue, which may appear to be totally unrelated to the first, is the spirit which animates the State, the Zionist movement (if such could be said to exist at all) and the celebration of Statehood in this, the 52nd year of Medinat Yisra’el. How far have we come towards realizing the dreams which drove our brothers and sisters of the last two generations to drain swamps, pave roads, patrol borders and make the desert bloom? Is there anything left of that dream today? Has the contemplative sobriety of Yom haZikaron invaded the celebratory tone of Yom ha’Atzma’ut so that we no longer feel that we have anything to celebrate?

This may sound like a curious question; unfortunately, a recent change in the “public face” of Israel nearly provides an automatic response in the negative to the former question and an affirmative one to the latter.

Succinctly put, how close is the vision which created our State to the reality experienced by her citizens today? Is it at all possible to speak of a “shared vision” within the various segments of the Jewish population? (a proper analysis of the role of the Arab population in Medinat Yisra’el is beyond the scope of this essay – as well as beyond the ken of the author). Is there a vision which can include the entire “world of Torah”?

As noted, these questions do not necessarily seem to be of one cloth and one would rightly anticipate separate analyses. I believe, however, that there is an underlying question which informs all of these issues, the resolution of which, more to our point, may be the foundation around which a satisfactory (and satisfying) direction may be found.

At the outset, let me admit that this undertaking is too great for even Mikra-postings. I readily confess that it seems presumptuous to suggest that a “great foundation” can be presented in these pages which will accomplish what no end of pundits, rabbis, political advisors and community leaders have failed to generate. Yet every one of us is called to contribute our best to K’lal Yisra’el, even if it falls short of the contributions made by others. Perhaps the suggestions raised in these pages will provide some food for thought which will stimulate further discussion in the cause of Am Yisra’el b’Eretz Yisra’el...t’he zot s’chari.

## III. POLITICAL ZIONISM AND ITS RECENT PRECURSORS

Generally speaking, when we refer to the “Zionist dream”, reference is made to that specific vision shared by the progenitors of the Zionist movement of the late 19th century. Ardent socialists who found that they could not build their utopia in Eastern Europe, they directed their energies towards our ancient homeland, Palestine. They were avowed secularists, whose Zionism was as much the product of their disaffection from the established (read: religious) Jewish community (as they were swept along in the exhilaration of the Enlightenment) as it was an outgrowth of their “Jewish roots”. They envisioned a Jewish state that would offer all that is noble about Judaism – essentially the finest of Western culture and academia – to the world and would be a haven where all Jews could come to participate in that great enterprise. The great ideals of socialism would be realized on Jewish native soil, as the Jewish people would achieve their destiny of being a “light unto the nations.” Since this is not chiefly a historic piece, I will not include here a summary of the development of the Zionism movement, the various Congresses etc. Suffice it to say that the vision shared by these early Zionists was not infused with – or even informed by – Torah sensibilities. Political Zionism was very much the daughter of the Zeitgeist of the second half of the last century and, as such, was caught up with the heady arrogance of that exciting time. There was no need for the “old ways”, so closely identified with the mentality of “Galut”. A “new Jew” was going to be created; a Jew unbound by centuries of tradition and belief, a “modern” Jew who would be able to sit at the table (literally as well as figuratively) with the member of any other nation and look at him as an equal.

Surprising as most Jews would find it, these hardy socialists were not the only Jews to “make Aliyah” in the 19th century – nor were they the first.

Religious Jews had been living in Eretz Yisra’el for nearly a century before the first Zionist Congress took place in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897. Truth to tell, there were small (but not at all insignificant) communities of Jews in Israel who had been there for countless generations – some claiming that they never left!

At the beginning of the 19th century, followers of the Vilna Ga’on (d. 1797) and R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady (the first Lubavitcher Rebbe – d. 1813) made Aliyah. In both cases, unlike the communities which had been there for several centuries, these new Olim saw themselves as the vanguard of the Mashiach. In a lengthy treatise, Kol haTor, authored by R. Hillel of Sh’klov, the Vilna Ga’on’s many teachings regarding the special nature of the times and the steps needed to be taken to inspire the coming of the Mashiach are outlined. The students of the Ga’on settled in Tz’fat and Yerushalayim; whereas the main Habad community was in Hevron.

Along with these “Messianic activists” (more on this term later), there were communities of representatives of many of the European communities in Yerushalayim. As their representatives, their task was fully devotional – to study and pray in the holy city, accepting their material support from their home/host community abroad. Although this system had only become popular in the 1700s, there are examples of this type of “representative/devotional” Aliyah dating back to the Middle Ages.

In any case, it is clear that both a personal connection with the Land of Israel and a sense that this was an auspicious time to settle the Land were not sentiments exclusively felt within the secular community of Jewish socialists.

So far, we have seen three motivating factors for people to want to move to Eretz Yisra’el – only one of which would necessarily involve political sovereignty and statehood:

- 1) A place for Jews to implement the socialist visions sweeping across Western and Central Europe – in a Jewish milieu;
- 2) As a somewhat mechanistic activity designed to both hasten the coming of Mashiach and to be properly prepared for his advent.
- 3) To reside in the Holy Land, preferably within the Holy City, studying Torah and praying to God.

(To be sure, there were always Jews who were motivated to “make Aliyah” for other reasons. The story is told that R. Hayyim Brisker, one of the most ardent and outspoken opponents of Political Zionism desired to move to Israel, plant an orchard and, thereby, be able to fulfill the various Mitzvot which obtain exclusively in the Land. He never realized his dream.)

With the organization of “Zionism” as a political movement at the end of the century, however, religious sentiments regarding the Land of Israel decidedly cooled. That is not to say that interest in the fate of Eretz Yisra’el waned; but vehement opposition to the Zionists and anything associated with their program led to an almost wholesale refusal on the

part of rabbinic authorities to have anything to do with their efforts. Whatever judgment the Ribbono Shel Olam may have passed on this question – He is, after all, the sole arbiter in historic questions (see Rav Yoseph D. Soloveitchik, *Hamesh D'rashot*, p. 23), the outspoken antagonism of most of the Rabbinic collegium throughout Eastern Europe is easily understood. Not only were the Zionists avowedly secular, they also planned to build their own (avowedly secular) state on holy ground!

Although the “Messianic activist” school continued to have capable spokesmen, (e.g. R. Yehudah Alkalai, R. Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer), the influence of this movement had waned by the time Political Zionism’s message was publicized. This set the scene for the two leaders – one political and the other a visionary – who did more than anyone (before or since) to change the relationship between Zionism and the world of Torah-committed Jews: Rabbi Yitzchak Ya’akov Reines and Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook. We will begin next week’s installment with a brief survey of their programmatic and policy agenda relating to the resettlement of Eretz Yisra’el. In the meantime, here are the “provisional” answers to the questions posited above.

#### **IV. THE UNIQUE DEMANDS OF JEWISH STATEHOOD**

The Rishonim note that, unlike personal Tzara’at and that afflicting clothing, Tzara’at haBayit is directly and exclusively related to houses in Eretz Yisra’el. Ibn Ezra (14:34) states that: “For this only applies in the Land, on account of the superior nature of the Land, because the Mikdash is among them and the Glory is in the Mikdash.” In other words, the afflictions which plague the houses are only considered significant in the Land, due to the Glory of God manifest there.

The Land is, indeed and just as God promised us, filled with all manner of good things. And the gold of that Land is good – teaching that there is no Torah like the Torah of Eretz Yisra’el and there is no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisra’el. (B’resheet Rabbah 16:4) But those great goods can only be realized when Am Yisra’el achieves its destiny, not operating as an amalgamation of pious individuals, but as a kingdom of Kohanim and holy nation. Building a nation, overcoming the tribal and sectarian considerations which animate a nation of recently liberated slaves (or a people long exiled from their Land) takes much serious work and there are no easy solutions to the many dilemmas which face national leaders:

It has been taught: R. Shim’on b. Yohai says: haKadosh Barukh Hu gave Yisra’el three precious gifts, and all of them were given only through sufferings. These are: The Torah, Eretz Yisra’el and the world to come. (BT Berakhot 5a)

The goodness of Eretz Yisra’el, the beauty of a national entity which reflects most perfectly the ideals of God’s Torah, is a job which takes much digging and hard work – and necessitates the overcoming of great afflictions and obstacles. Had God merely directed us to the hidden gold of the K’na’anim, we would have mistakenly thought that nation building – “building our house” – is an easy task. We would not even have had to build, just inherit a previously built house, with gold and silver waiting for us. Tzara’at haBayit teaches us that it is specifically when we are faced with plagues, with scaly walls and moldy bricks, that we are called not to look away but to root them out – for that is exactly how our firmest foundations will be built and the greatest riches will be unearthed.

Who is qualified to direct this search for national treasures? Which type of leader has the mandate to address the “plagues of the house” and identify how best to clean them out? It is the Kohen, whose function is most eloquently described by Malakhi as follows:

For the Kohen’s lips should guard knowledge, and they should seek the Torah from his mouth; for he is a messenger of Hashem T’zakot. (Malakhi 2:7)

Why, then, does the Torah first present “personal” afflictions, then afflictions relating to clothing, only concluding with Tzara’at haBayit? Great nationalist movements have often placed such an overwhelming stress on the success and weal of the group that the moral development of the individual – as well as his welfare – have no place in the national agenda. Jewish nation-building, conversely, is a process of balancing the needs of the individual (the P’rat) against those of the community (the K’lal).

In order to build a righteous nation, which can serve as a theistic-ethical beacon for the nations of the world, we need to insure that the individual members of the group are successfully facing their own “plagues” (“personal” Tzara’at), as well as those which affect their interactions with others (Tzara’at haBeged).

We now understand why the Torah presents the various forms of Tzara’at in this order – for we must first develop righteous

individuals and a holy society if we are to have any hope of creating and maintaining the nation which carries God's Name and enshrines Him in their midst.

Text Copyright &copy 2013 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom and Torah.org. The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles.