

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI NACHMAN KAHANA

National Council of Young Israel

The appearance of a white blemish on the outer skin and the paling of the hair within the area of the blemish, is nega tzaraat (the plague of tzaraat) and, when declared as such by a Kohain, the sufferer becomes tamay (spiritually unclean). Under these circumstances he may not reside within a walled city in Eretz Yisrael and must live as a recluse as prescribed in the Torah.

Within the overall mysteries surrounding any and all of the Mitzvot of the Torah, there is a particular detail in the laws of Metzora which seemingly defies all explanation.

The Torah states in VaYikra 13, 12-13: And if the Tzaraat breaks out on the skin and the Tzaraat covers all the skin from head to feet as far as the Kohain can see: then the Kohain shall look and behold if the Tzaraat has covered all his flesh he [the Kohain] shall pronounce him clean, it has all turned white, he is clean.

We see here that if the blemish is limited to a part or even several parts of the body, he is considered a Metzora with all the Halachic implications that implies but, if the blemish spreads to cover his entire body, he is declared clean and may return to his home. This is surely a dilemma.

However, the matter may be explained by an event which occurred in the period of the Kings of Israel.

The book of Melachim II, Chapter 14, 23-27: In the fifteenth year of Amaziah, son of Joash, King of Judah, Jeroboam, son of Joash, King of Israel, began to reign in Samaria...and he did that which was evil in the sight of the L-rd, he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nevat, who caused Israel to sin: He (Jeroboam ben Joash) restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamat to the sea of Araba...for the

L-rd saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter...neither was there any helper for Israel: And the L-rd did not wish to blot out the name of Israel from under heaven...

We have here a king who rejected the Torah and is even compared to the arch-evil Jeroboam ben Nevat, who according to the Mishna in Sanhedrin is one of three kings who do not have a place in The World To Come. Nevertheless, Jeroboam ben Joash was victorious in all his military campaigns, extending the boundaries of Israel to their fullest.

How is it that such a total denier of Torah succeeded in his reign as king? The answer is stated in the verses: For the L-rd saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter...neither was there any helper for Israel. And the L-rd did not wish to blot out the name of Israel from under heaven.

Jeroboam ben Joash lived in times where the spiritual situation of the nation was so neglected, that according to the strict letter of the law the people were worthy of the harshest of treatment. However, since the L-rd did not wish to destroy His chosen nation of Israel, He had no choice (so to say) but to condescend to their human frailties and with compassion aid them in victory.

This, in effect, is the principle behind the cleansing of the Metzora whose entire being became afflicted with Tzaraat. This man had reached a spiritual level so low as to make Tshuvah almost impossible. According to the letter of the Torah, he has lost the privilege to remain alive; however, since for reasons known only to the Al-Mighty, Judge of the world, this individual must still remain alive, HaShem must go out from the Midat HaDin (the quality of pure justice) and adopt towards him a compassionate attitude, the expression of which is the revocation of the severe laws of Metzora.

In our times, beginning with the Haskala and denial of Torah from Sinai and the authority of Rabbanim to interpret and impose Halachic decisions, not only by individuals but even through movements such as Reform and Conservative, the Jewish nation has reached a low point in our spiritual mission in this world. We do not have the benefit of a prophet or a judge and we flounder through mediocrity and reject the status imposed upon us by HaShem as His chosen nation.

The establishment of Medinat Yisrael three short years after the Holocaust was a repetition of the

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
in memory of Yehoshua Menachem (Shea) ben Mayer

לעילוי נשמת יהושע מנחם בן מאיר ז"ל
פטר יב ניסן תשס"ד

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manner in which HaShem reacted to the generation of Jeroboam ben Joash twenty-seven hundred years ago.

Today, fifty years after the Holocaust, one cannot deny the great advances made in the Torah world but neither is one permitted to deny the enormous weaknesses of our generation. When inter-marriage is running at the rate of fifty percent in New York and eighty percent nationwide, when Eretz Yisrael thirsts for the mass Aliya of Torah dedicated people who can fight the assimilating tendencies of secularists who have infiltrated into the leadership of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael, we cannot deny that there is a spiritual Tzara'at within us.

But perhaps our weakness is also our strength. Perhaps, the absence of giant Torah leaders, the mediocrity of our accomplishments and the ferocity and cruelty of our enemies will force the Al-Mighty to have pity on His nation Israel. As the verse says, For the L-rd saw the affliction of Israel that it was very bitter...neither was there any helper for Israel: And the L-rd did not wish to blot out the name of Israel from under heaven... (see the last Mishna in Tractate Sota). © 2003 Rabbi N. Kahana & NCYI

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

After the laws of Tzara'at, the Torah in Chapter 15 turns to the laws of "zav," a man or woman with impure bodily flows. This includes several types of ritual impurity, but the most prominent characters in the chapter are a man, who is described in verses 1-15, and a woman "whose blood flows for many days, not at the time of her regular period" [Vayikra 15:25]. The detailed laws are written in verses 25-30. In both cases, there are similar processes of purification and atonement. They must both count seven clean days and then on the eighth day, they must take "two doves or

two young pigeons" [15:14,29] and bring them to the Kohen who will offer one as a Chatat and the other as an Olah, as atonement for their impurity.

However, there is one clear difference between the verses for the man and for the woman. With respect to a man, it is written, "And when the zav will become pure from his flow, he shall count seven days for his purity, and he shall wash his clothing and bathe his flesh in spring water, and he will become pure" [15:13]. For a woman, it is written, "When she becomes pure from her flow, she shall count seven days and then become pure" [15:28], but there is no mention of bathing in water or washing her clothing. As is well known, a woman is also required to immerse herself, but there remains a difference between a man and a woman: "A man must bathe in spring water, while this is not required for a woman" [Tosefta Megilla 1:14].

In addition, there are parallel laws that appear with respect to both men and women, such as the fact that beds and seats on which they sit become impure, but some of the laws appear only with respect to men. For example, only for a man is it written, "If the zav spits on one who is pure, he must wash his clothing and bathe in water, and he will be impure until nightfall. And any carriage on which the zav rides will be impure." [15:8-9]. There is no corresponding rule with respect to a woman. What is the reason for these differences?

Evidently, even though the phenomenon is given the same name, there are fundamental differences between a man who is a "zav" and a woman who is a "zava." For a man, the entire process is outside the bounds of usual natural events, similar to tza'at (leprosy), and therefore the situation requires stringent laws and a process of complete and total purification. For a woman, on the other hand, the Torah has divided the phenomenon into two categories. It starts with the laws pertaining to a regular period, where there is no mention at all of a need for atonement and purification, as is written by the Ramban: "The Torah was lenient with respect to the flows of a woman during her regular period and there is no need for her to bring a sacrifice, since this is part of her nature and not a cure of a malady." Only afterwards are the laws given pertaining to a woman "whose blood flows for many days, not at the time of her regular period." And now the Torah is indeed referring to a sickness, similar to the case of a man. "But if she has a flow for many days, not at her usual time... this is an illness similar to the case of a man, and in this case she is required to offer a sacrifice when she is cured, just like a man" [Ramban]. In spite of the fact that this is considered a sickness, it is still the continuation of the natural process of a regular period, which has continued for an extra length of time. This is completely different from the process for a man, which is unusual from beginning to end, as noted above.

Thus, in order to emphasize the essential difference between a man and a woman, the Torah

described the laws of a man in a more stringent way than it describes the laws of a woman.

The Left Earlobe of the One Being Purified

by Rabbi Uri Dasberg

Deaf people have a special status in the halacha. There are many mitzvot which require a sense of hearing in their observance, such as sounding a shofar, reading the Megilla, reading the Torah, reciting a blessing, and prayer. It is true that there are different levels of hearing needed for various mitzvot—for example, shofar cannot be observed by hearing an echo, while one who is in a pit is permitted to listen to the Megilla. One general question that can be asked is whether listening to something through a hearing aid can be considered as hearing within the requirements of the halacha. Hearing aids are used not only by people who cannot hear at all but also by some people with partially impaired hearing, and it has been claimed that such people can hear as well as normal people when they use the proper hearing aid. On the other hand, there are those who feel that the sound from a hearing aid is not the true voice of the reader or the one who blows the shofar but rather the vibrations of a mechanical membrane, since basically a hearing aid is a tiny microphone and a speaker.

In Jewish sources, the deaf are usually lumped together as a group with a minor and a fool, in that they are all considered as not having a proper understanding of their surroundings. (In this article, we will not go into the differences between various cases, such as whether one is deaf from birth or has become deaf during his lifetime, or between deafness that stems from a mental defect as opposed to deafness caused by a mechanical fault of the organs of hearing, such as a hole in the eardrum.)

So far we have been discussing a hearing aid that is external to the body (even if it is well hidden deep inside the ear canal or the folds of the ear). The law might be different for a cochlear implant, which is surgically inserted into the head of the patient. People with an implant, even if they have been deaf from birth, are able to hear as well as any normal person, they often do not need to see the lips of the person speaking, and they can even hold conversations over a telephone, just like anybody else. This mechanical device transfers the sound to the brain in a direct way, without any intervening membranes. It is true that a training period is often necessary when the implant is first inserted, and that at first many people may not understand the sounds they hear at all, but this can probably be compared to an immigrant who hears a new language for the first time. Both the person with the implant and the new immigrant will eventually learn to translate the new signals in the brain into meaningful sounds. Such a new immigrant is not considered "deaf" in halachic terms, and perhaps the same can be said

about a person with a cochlear implant. Reference: Dr. Yisrael Berma, "Techumin," volume 24, pages 173-178

Tzara'at and the Land

by Rabbi Eliad Sekori, Head of Torah Mitzion Kollel, Kansas City

"When you arrive in the Land of Canaan... I will place the malady of tzara'at in a house of your heritage" [Vayikra 14:34]. Our sages taught us, "this is good news, that these blemishes will happen to them" [Horayot 11]. Rashi adds, based on the Midrash, "This is because the Amorites hid treasures of gold in the walls of their houses, and when there is a blemish the house must be broken, and the treasures are found." However, early commentators have asked: Doesn't the Almighty have more pleasant ways to make Bnei Yisrael rich, must the good news come about by having the house torn apart?

Evidently, the destruction of the house has an intrinsic value of its own. We have been taught, "Blemishes are the result of pride and slander" [Arachin 16], two traits that lead to a separation between people. "Since he caused a division between man and wife and between one person and his friend, the Torah commanded 'Let him sit alone outside the camp—outside all three camps' [Rashi, Vayikra 13:46].

Pride and slander lead to divisions, to exaggerated individualism, and to giving precedence to personal interests over a general viewpoint that takes into account the needs of others. This is the meaning of the words of the sages, "No house will become ritually impure until after the conquest of the land and the division" [Yoma 14]. This sin will occur only when the land has been divided, and private property exists. In addition, "Jerusalem does not become impure because of blemishes. Why is this so? It is written, 'in a house of your heritage' [14:34]. But Jerusalem was not divided among the tribes." That is, whenever there is no division and no private property, there cannot be a case of tzara'at, because this is an educational punishment for man showing that exaggerated emphasis on private property, something that is good up to a point, can harm the general public.

Another question to be asked is why the land outside of Eretz Yisrael never becomes impure with tzara'at, as is written, "the land of your heritage" [14:34] -- see Nega'im 12:4. The answer is that outside of the land it is impossible for Bnei Yisrael to be united in a complete way, and there is thus no demand for unity, backed up by the punishment of tzara'at. "Who can be compared to your nation Yisrael, one nation in the land?" [II Shmuel 7:23]. The sages explained, when they are in the land, they are a unified nation. Therefore, tzara'at is only relevant within Eretz Yisrael. It will not occur in Jerusalem, where there is no private land, or outside the land, where there is no demand for unity.

Arrival in Eretz Yisrael leads to a demand and makes it possible to rise up to a very high level of unity

and a decrease in the importance of private property. That is why it is necessary to shatter the boundaries of the house which define privacy and to become more open to the community, in an effort to achieve unity. Perhaps this is the real treasure, the good news brought by a blemish that is revealed by the shattering of the walls of the house.

As this summer approaches, we may begin to feel that the strength of our attachment to Eretz Yisrael might harm the unity of the nation. But this is not true. Rather, the revelation of the true face of the land is related to "nega'im," blemishes, which lead to deeper levels of understanding. Let us hope and pray that the Almighty will strengthen our hold on all parts of the land, together with continued unity and love for all of Yisrael.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Leprosy, the subject of our parsha, is traditionally associated with the sin of slander. Thus, there is a similarity between the Hebrew word for leprosy-metzora-and the Hebrew words for speaking evil about another-motze shaim ra. The Torah reminds us of the danger of bad speech.

The ability to speak has the capacity to raise a human being above the lower animal world. Hence, Rabbi Yehudah Halevi labels the human being as medaber, one who speaks. Speech is what sets the human being apart.

But, the greater the potential to do good, the greater the possibility for that potential to turn into evil. Speech can raise one to the highest level, but if abused, it can sink us to the lowest depth.

Indeed, injurious speech has enormous ramifications. Although when we were kids, we would say "sticks and bones can break my bones, but names can never harm me," it is actually not true. Words and name-calling can actually hurt deeply. It also should be remembered that while a word is a word and a deed is a deed, words lead to deeds. Once a word has been said, it is almost impossible to take back, for a spoken word spreads to others in ways that can never be undone.

A few years back, Charlie Ward, the New York Knickerbocker basketball player, uttered words that really hurt. He repeated the often-heard lie that it was the Jews who murdered

Jesus. He compounded his mistake by adding that even today Jews continue to persecute Christians.

Not only did those words lead to great pain, they can lead to, and have led to, tragic ramifications. Such comments have been used historically to justify Christian anti-Semitism. When, during the Crusades, Jews were murdered, Christians claimed that it was in retribution for the Jewish murder of Jesus. The Jews, they reasoned, had to be punished.

These words not only spread to so many in those times, but their consequences have been felt

through the generations. Professor Raul Hilberg in the *Destruction of the European Jews*, noted the parallel between Nazi anti-Semitism, and anti-Jewish legislation practiced by the Church. Hilberg refers to the churches anti-Jewish legislation as "fifteen hundred years of destructive activity."

A rabbinic tale: A rabbi was once asked, what is the most expensive meat. He responded, "tongue." And the next day the rabbi was asked what is the least expensive meat. Here too he responded, "tongue." Such is the challenge of speech. One that the Torah reminds us about this week, and one that we should all take to heart. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Was it a good thing to get "tzora'as" or a bad thing? It would seem that it was a bad thing, as it came as a result of having committed a sin. And Rashi (Horiyos 10a) tells us explicitly that the "tzora'as" that occurs in a house is "a bad thing." The Midrashim that list the sins for which "tzora'as" comes also seem to indicate that it is a bad thing.

One of those sins is being stingy. Midrash Rabbah (Vayikra 17:2 and 3) and Midrash Tanchuma (Metzora 4, or 10, depending on the edition) tell us that if someone refused to lend out his tools - pretending that he didn't own the tool being asked for - everyone will see that he really did own one when he is forced to empty his house before the Kohain comes to determine whether or not there really is "tzora'as" (14:36, see also Yoma 11b). The Talmud (Erchin 16a) extends this to a thief, as everyone will see that he had items hidden in his house that weren't really his. Because these items are being removed before the Kohain comes, it gives the sinner a chance to repent, perhaps preventing the "plague" from ever being labeled as "tzora'as," thereby avoiding having to destroy at least part of the house.

If this "tzora'as" comes because the owner of the house had sinned, it would follow that its occurrence is not a good thing. Yet, Rashi (14:34) tells us that the reason G-d will afflict houses with "tzora'as" is because the previous inhabitants of the land, upon hearing that the Nation of Israel is coming, hid their golden treasures inside the walls of their houses. By "forcing" us to break open the wall where the "tzora'as" is, G-d is showing us where these treasures were hidden. That sounds like a pretty good thing to me! So I'll pose the question again: Was it a good thing to get "tzora'as" or a bad thing? If the "tzora'as" came as a result of a sin, how is the sinner being rewarded with hidden treasures?

Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, says that "even though he merited [finding] the treasure, nevertheless if he is completely worthy he would have gotten the treasure without any loss or anguish. Being that G-d did not give him [the treasure] except through loss and anguish, we can see from this that he sinned and

deserved punishment; but he also has merits based upon which [G-d] revealed the treasure to him. Therefore, he must be concerned about the sin and repent, and not have a clear conscience based on his deserving the treasure." That an individual can do both good and not-so-good deeds is plainly obvious, and that G-d does not overlook one because of the other should be obvious as well. However, that G-d metes out both reward and punishment in one fell swoop may not be as obvious.

The Sefornu (13:47) says that since "tzora'as" was sent as a message that something needs to be "fixed" (spiritually), only those who could "receive" such a message would be "sent" one. If a person wasn't trying to improve, trying to come closer to G-d, this message would fall on deaf ears; it is therefore pointless to send it. Only someone that already has a relationship with G-d, who will try to figure out what needs improvement, will experience the divine message of "tzora'as" that something needs to be worked on. (Those that don't have such a relationship, on the other hand, will be "left to the dogs," with no divine protection from any evil that may befall them.) It follows, then, that anyone who might be sent the message of "tzora'as" would also deserve to find a treasure.

As important as deserving the treasure, is having the ability to take the divine message to heart and correct any problems that might co-exist with the good. In fact, the real "treasure" of the "tzora'as" experience is the improvement it can bring about, changing a "bad thing" that might have some good side effects into a completely "good thing." © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd He shall restore the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers." (Malachi 3:24)

This coming Sabbath—at least as far as the Rabbinical homily (drashah) before the festival of Passover is concerned—is known as Shabbat Hagadol, or the Great Sabbath. In a usual calendar year, when there are at least several days between the Sabbath and Passover, we read on Shabbat Hagadol the prophetic portion from Malachi, who speaks of the "great and awesome day" which will precede the redemption. It is actually Elijah the prophet who will herald this day, and Elijah's major task will be "to restore the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents."

Apparently our prophet understood that the major issue facing each and everyone of us is discord within the family, and if the period of redemption will be one of harmony and love such rapprochement must begin with parent-child relationship. However, there is one strange note within this verse, the fifth commandment ordains that children honor their

parents; Malachi begins his familial charge to the parents who must first turn their hearts to the children. What does this mean?

Many years ago I suggested that imbedded in the prophetic verse was the prophets vision of our very unique generation, when the ba'al teshuvah (penitent) movement will be so successful that many parents will be learning from their children around the seder table. Although it is undoubtedly true, as Maimonides teaches us, that there will be no redemption without penitential return (teshuva), life experiences have taught me that there is still another interpretation to Malachi's words.

Of all of the challenges that each of us adults have in life, none is greater than that of being a parent and grand-parent. Tragically, although in order to drive a car or provide a professional service one requires a license which is only issued after successfully passing difficult examinations, one becomes a parent without having taken a single course and without having to prove one's parental abilities. The seder, which is an expression of the commandment, "And you shall tell (the Jewish tradition-Haggadah) to your children" expresses the challenge of parenting at its very opening. Each of the participants around the table takes karpas, which is usually translated as a green vegetable portending the spring season. However, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger suggests in his interpretation of the Haggadah that the word karpas is derived from the special striped and colored garment which father Jacob gave to his favorite son Joseph, called in Hebrew passim and which Rashi links to the special karpas embroidery decorating King Achashverosh's palace (Genesis 37:3 and Rashi ad loc). We generally dip our vegetable in salt water; however there is an alternative custom to dip the karpas in charoset a mixture of nuts and wine which the Jerusalem Talmud suggests is reminiscent of blood. When we remember that the brothers of Joseph dipped his karpas cloak into the blood of the slaughtered ram (Genesis 37:31), it is clear that we are opening the seder remembering the relationship between father Jacob and Joseph, about which the Rabbis of the Talmud criticized the parent who favors one child among the others and thereby causes familial jealousy (B.T. Shabbat 10b). From this perspective, the seder is at one and the same time instructing the parent of his major task to impart Jewish traditions to his children, but warning the parent of the challenges and even difficulties which go along with parenthood.

How can we avoid the pitfall? First of all, it is crucial to be loving and accepting of all of our children, even of those who may have strayed far from the path. That is why there are four children type-casted around the seder table one of them being the wicked child. He too must be given a place which enables him to feel the familial embrace. Even more noteworthy is how the Haggadah defines the wicked child: he is neither a Sabbath desecrator nor a partaker of non-kosher food but is rather one who excludes himself from the

community of Israel. For Judaism it is critical that the Jew feels him/herself to be a member of the Jewish family entire. It is incumbent upon every Jewish parent to inclusively accept all the children. The wicked child may even ask provocative and sometimes insolent questions to the parents, and is then told by the author of the Haggadah: "hakheh his teeth" a difficult verb usually translated as "blunt his teeth" or give him a slap across the mouth.

Nothing could be further from the true interpretation. The Hebrew verb hakheh means to remove the sharpness of an iron implement by the warmth of fire (Kohelet 10:10). The wise parent will take away the sting from the words of a wicked child through familial love and warmth.

Finally, I would suggest that parents must never stereotype their children. Indeed, each of the stereotypes in the Haggadah can be looked at in an opposite way. The wise child may turn out to be a know-it-all, who is supercilious and arrogant. Indeed, the famed Seer of Lublin would always say, "I prefer the wicked person who knows he is wicked to the righteous who thinks he is righteous." At least the wicked person is honest and he has a real chance of repenting. The one who is called foolish may in reality be naive and wholehearted and the child does "not know how to ask" may be operating in a realm far beyond logic and much closer to the Divine. At any rate, each of us has a little bit of each of the four children within our own personality; hardly anyone is consistent-either in being good or being wicked-all the time. The message of the Haggadah: be loving and not judgmental, wise and not punitive. © 2004 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Chaim Kanterovitz, Yeshurun Synagogue, Gatley

Rashi, in the name of our Sages, mentions that metzora is a combination of two words motzi and ra which in turn indicates to us the sin of motzi shem ra (slander).

When the words we speak are unhealthy and infectious we discover affliction. This appears in various manifestations: the body, the clothes and the walls of one's home. However, the most striking is the affliction of the body as a reaction to a sin. Rav Tzvi Yehudah Hakohen Kook points out that there is an integral connection between the body of the human being and his inner soul on a psychobiological level. This is why the inner decay reveals itself externally on the body and then it spreads to a person's surroundings.

A Jew can either inspire those around him with the light of Torah and holiness or, if he chooses, he can spread unhealthy social decay. The words spoken from our mouths are the communication we have with our social surroundings. Lashon hara, the evil tongue, is the

vehicle through which the relationship between a person and his fellow can be damaged. Therefore, historically, metzoraim- lepers were outcasts of society. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Haftarah usually read this week.

The Haftarah (Kings 2 :7: 3-20) speaks of four lepers. They had been socially alienated. Expelled from society, they were sitting at the gate of the city. Despite their lonely existence, these people represent those distanced from the general Jewish community and yet they are an integral part of the nation. Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook (the father of above) quotes the Talmud Berachot 30b, where, in relation to prayer the following ruling appears: Even if a snake is crawling up one's ankle one should not stop one's prayers (the Amidah). However, the Gemarah goes on to say that, in the case of a scorpion, one does stop one's prayers. (33a). This is also enshrined in the Shulchan Aruch as law (Orach Chaim 104:3).

The Zohar comments here that the snake represents the Satan, the evil inclination or those who would have a negative influence. Despite the snake's presence, the prayer goes on. The connection is there and one can still pray. However, the Hebrew for scorpion is akrav, an acronym for akar bayit, referring to those who remove themselves from their national belonging. In such a case, communication with G-d ceases.

The important lesson we learn here is that, if one disassociates oneself totally from one's people to the extent that one will effectively be out of touch, then there is not much hope. However, if one clings to one's national identity, being a part of the Jewish nation, no matter how distant, as we see from the lepers in the Haftarah, then there is still a connection to the sanctity of Israel. As a result, there is room for hope for a full return. © 2005 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha discusses a type of plague that settles itself in the walls of one's home. If the plague spreads along the walls of the house in a certain halachically defined pattern, the house eventually may have to be destroyed. There is opinion in the Talmud that this plague in the walls of a house remains a purely hypothetical case, since the halachic requirements for the plague's pattern of spreading in those walls are so technically exacting as to make this a case impossible of actual fulfillment. Nevertheless, the Talmud admonishes us to study this matter in order to be rewarded for so doing. Apparently the Torah wishes us to understand the consequences of plagues in the walls of one's home. I have always connected the appearance of a plague in the walls of a house to the biblical verse that states that a stolen stone in a wall

and an ill-gotten beam in the ceiling continually shout that they are stolen. Strictly speaking, Jewish law would require the demolition of the wall or the ceiling so that the stone or beam can be returned to its rightful owner. However, the rabbis lightened the burden of the thief by saying that monetary compensation would suffice, doing so in the hope that this would lead the thief to repent of his deed more easily. Yet, a house that has a plague in its walls, in the sense of stones that constantly proclaim that they are stolen, is doomed to destruction. Technically, the plague may not be able to bring the house down. But morally speaking, the house is doomed at some point of its existence.

The entire concept of tzoraat - the plagues discussed in last week's parsha of Tazria and this week's parsha - are related to the issues of speaking poorly and slanderously against others. A house filled with bad language, poor speech and slander of others is truly a wrecked and wretched home. There are plagues that descend on one's clothing - one's outside appearance, one's public standing in the community, if you will - as well. Again, the person who is known as a slanderer and tale-monger is eventually reviled by his or her own community. The plague of personality that slander inflicts on its perpetrators becomes visible and obvious to all. But the worst of all forms of this plague of tzoraat is the one that infects the person, the slanderer, directly. For it corrodes one's soul and renders one a cynic, a mocker, a person to stay away from.

Just as the plague of tzoraat was deemed to be a contagious one by most of the biblical commentators, so too is the weakness of slander a contagious condition. The Talmud teaches us that the slanderer is a triple murderer. He kills himself by speaking bad speech, he kills the person he is speaking to who will now accept the slander, and he kills the victim of his slander about whom he is speaking. These twin causes of tzoraat in one's home - thievery and slanderous speech - must be combated at all levels of our lives and beings. Only by so doing can we aspire to have a plague-free home and general environment. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI ZVI MILLER

Parsha Insights

The Torah (Vayikra 14:4) obligates a metzora (one who has a spiritual disease called tza'aras) to bring an atonement sacrifice that consists of two birds. Rashi explains the significance of this offering. Tza'aras comes as a punishment for loshon hora (slander); and loshon hora is a consequence of idle conversation. Meaning, idle conversation, in and of itself, may not necessarily involve loshon hora. Nevertheless, idle conversation is the cause and context that engenders

loshon hora. Hence a bird offering is prescribed for purification because birds chirp incessantly - just as one who speaks loshon hora engages in endless chatter."

According to the Tosefta, loshon hora is worse than idol worship, immorality, and murder. Indeed, the destruction that loshon hora causes is tantamount to murder. What relevance does the chirping of a bird have to the enormous harm of loshon hora? Moreover, the bird signifies idle slander, which is only the cause of loshon hora. Wouldn't a bull, which is vicious by nature, serve as a more effective symbol of the devastation and pain caused by loshon hora?

The bird offering reveals that idle conversation, even without loshon hora, is a serious human flaw. The faculty of speech is the attribute that differentiates us from the animals. HaShem breathed a living, speaking soul into Adam. Since speech is G-dly, it must be used only for G-dly purposes - Torah, prayer, and words of kindness.

Empty conversation is a profanation of speech. Misuse of speech denies us of our essential quality "and thereby reduces man to an animal" "who is not endowed with the gift of speech. Hence, the chirping bird is a sharp reminder of his flaw "the penchant for meaningless chitchat. Once speech is debased, corruption overtakes man and he quickly uses speech for evil instead of for good.

The Mishneh (Avos) tells us that there is nothing better than silence. In today's world of cell phones and open communication the notion of silence seems extreme. Yet training ourselves to restrain our tongues from idle chatter will save us from speaking loshon hora. The more silence we practice, the more quietude we will add to our lives. And the more we will preserve, enrich and sanctify our living, speaking soul. *[Based on the Da'as Torah of Rabenu Yerucham HaLevi]*

Implement: Refrain from engaging in frivolous conversation. © 2005 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

We will examine Rashi's "lead word"-in Hebrew, "dibbur hamaschil." Each Rashi comment is introduced by a "lead word." Rashi's comment is based on it. These are printed in the Chumashim in bold letters. Rashi has his own style when it comes to "lead words." Understanding them saves us much time in trying to understand his commentary. Let us look at the first one in the Parshat Metzora.

"This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification. He shall be brought to the priest." (Leviticus 14:2)

In many printed Chumashim we find the following "lead word" in the first Rashi comment.

"This will be the law of, etc."-Rashi: "It teaches that he is not purified at night."

Rashi's comment seems clearly based on the words in the verse "on the day of his purification." The words "on the day" are unnecessary. The verse could have just written "in his purification." See verse 14:32 where this is what the Torah does say.

But what is strange is that the "lead word" does not contain the crucial words "on the day", upon which the interpretation is based.

This can be explained by the word "etc." (in Hebrew "v'gomer"), which Rashi added at the end of the "lead word." This always means that the continuation of the verse, though not explicitly quoted by Rashi, is also important for his comment. So the "etc." here could refer to the words "on the day," which excludes night-time purification.

But something else is strange about his "lead word" here, and by examining it we can learn something important to Rashi's Style with "lead words."

As a rule, Rashi's first "lead word" in every parsha contains the words which are the name of the parsha. Check this out throughout the Torah. This rule holds true, with only one exception-see Parshat Kedoshim.

But our "lead word" does not contain the word metzora which is the name of the parsha. I noticed this recently. It looked strange, then I checked with a more precise Chumash and found that the full "lead words" said, "This shall be the law of the Metzora." So here we have the name of the parsha included in the "lead word."

Being aware of Rashi's custom of always beginning a parsha with a "lead word" that contains the name of the parsha explains some puzzling Rashi comments. See Parshat Beshallah in the book of Exodus and Parshat Vayelech in the Book of Deuteronomy. Here Rashi has only a "lead word" (which contains the name of the parsha) but no comment whatever. This has puzzled many commentators on Rashi. Some have come up with creative interpretations of why Rashi has no comment on those "lead words." But in light of what we said, there is no difficulty. Rashi wrote the "lead word" to mark off the beginning of a new parsha-even if he had no comment to offer on these words.

(By the way, this same custom holds for Rashi's comment on the Talmud. He always has a comment on the first words of each new chapter in the Talmud.)

Understanding Rashi's style is important for fully understanding his brilliant commentary. © 2005 aish.org

RABBI NOSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

Chazal tell us that tza'ra'as afflicts a person because of his/her anti-social behavior. Lashon

ha'ra is the epitome of anti-social behavior. Hence, it comes as no surprise that Chazal see the metzora as a person who is 'motzi shem ra'-who says bad things about people or institutions. Likewise, we can readily understand that as part of his punishment/rehabilitation process, a metzora must dwell outside the community, excluded from society. Before the metzora may reenter the community, he must undergo a procedure for kapara (atonement). This procedure includes bringing two birds to the Beis HaMikdash. The Sfas Emes quotes Rashi on the reason for bringing one bird. Birds chatter mindlessly. So, too, the metzora is being warned about the consequences of speaking mindlessly about people or institutions.

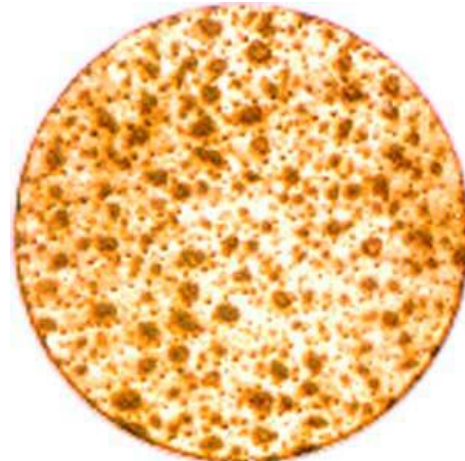
The Sfas Emes is bothered by a basic question. We can understand why the metzora brings one bird, which the kohein slaughters. Clearly, that bird is to atone for the person's mindless talk. But what is the message of the second bird, the one that is not slaughtered, but is set free?

The Sfas Emes answers by quoting a passage from the Zohar. That passage explains that scourges like tzara'as afflict a person because of "mila bisha; ve'ahl milin tavim... ve'lo mileil". That is, one bird is to deal with the lashon hara that the person spoke. The second bird is to deal with the good things that he could have said but did not say. The Sfas Emes quotes a pasuk in Tehilim (39:3): "Hechesheisi mitov, uke'eivi ne'echar." (R' S. R. Hirsch:

"I kept silent as regarded the good; my pain as all the more grievous because of [my silence]." What the Torah is teaching us with the second bird is the importance of saying good words when we encounter something positive.

My mother, a'h', taught English literature. She used to quote the following lines from a poem: "The word we had not sense to say, Who knows how grand it might have rung?"

B'H', people have developed a much heightened awareness about the evils of lashon hara. Now let's also try to do better with lishna tava, speaking well of others! © 2005 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org



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