

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

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

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

Either way, this gives us a way of understanding the otherwise bewildering phenomenon of tsara'at, the condition dealt with at length in last week's parsha and this. It has been variously translated as leprosy, skin disease, or scaly infection. Yet there are formidable problems in identifying it with any known disease. First, its symptoms do not correspond to Hansen's disease, otherwise known as leprosy. Second, as described in the Torah it affects not only human beings but also the walls of houses, furniture

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לעילוי נשמת  
יהושע מנחם גרוסר בן מאיר ז"ל  
by Mayer Grosser

<sup>1</sup> Jon Ronson, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, London, Picador, 2015, 63-86.

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Jacquet, *Is Shame Necessary? New uses for an old tool*, London, Allen Lane, 2015.

and clothes. There is no known medical condition that has this property.

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

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

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

How are we to understand this? Why was "evil speech" regarded as so serious an offence that it took these strange phenomena to point to its existence? And why was it punished this way and not another?

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

In shame cultures, what matters is the judgment of others. Acting morally means conforming to public roles, rules and expectations. You do what other people expect you to do. You follow society's conventions. If you fail to do so, society punishes you by subjecting you to shame, ridicule, disapproval,

humiliation and ostracism. In guilt cultures what matters is not what other people think but what the voice of conscience tells you. Living morally means acting in accordance with internalised moral imperatives: "You shall" and "You shall not." What matters is what you know to be right and wrong.

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

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

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

When a person has the mark of the defiling disease, his clothing must have a tear in it, he must go without a haircut, and he must cover his head down to his lips. 'Unclean! Unclean!' he must call out. As long as he has the mark, he shall remain unclean. Since he is unclean, he must remain alone, and his place shall be outside the camp. (Lev. 13: 45-46)

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

comes the ostracism: temporary exclusion from the normal affairs of society. These have nothing to do with illness and everything to do with social disapproval. This is what makes the law of tsara'at so hard to understand at first: it is one of the rare appearances of public shame in a non-shame, guilt-based culture.<sup>3</sup> It happened, though, not because society had expressed its disapproval but because G-d was signalling that it should do so.

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

That is why the punishment for lashon hara was to be temporarily excluded from society by public exposure (the signs that appear on walls, furniture, clothes and skin), stigmatisation and shame (the torn clothes etc.) and ostracism (being forced to live outside the camp). It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to punish the malicious gossiper using the normal conventions of law, courts and the establishment of guilt. This can be done in the case of motsi shem ra, libel or slander, because these are all cases of making a false statement. Lashon hara is more subtle. It is done not by falsehood but by insinuation. There are many ways of harming a person's reputation without actually telling a lie. Someone accused of lashon hara can easily say, "I didn't say it, I didn't mean it, and even if I did, I did not say anything that was untrue." The best way of dealing with people who poison relationships without actually uttering falsehoods is by naming, shaming and shunning them.

That, according to the sages, is what tsara'at miraculously did in ancient times. It no longer exists in the form described in the Torah. But the use of the Internet and social media as instruments of public shaming illustrates both the power and the

<sup>3</sup> Another according to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai was the ceremony in which a slave who did not wish to go free after the completion of six years of service, had his ear pierced against a doorpost (Ex. 20: 6). See Rashi ad loc., and Kiddushin 22b.

danger of a culture of shame. Only rarely does the Torah invoke it, and in the case of the metsora only by an act of G-d, not society. Yet the moral of the metsora remains. Malicious gossip, lashon hara, undermines relationships, erodes the social bond, and damages trust. It deserves to be exposed and shamed.

Never speak ill of others, and stay far from those who do. *Covenant and Conversation 5775 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l © 2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

**T**his shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing, he shall be brought unto the priest" (Leviticus 14:2) In the opening of this week's portion of Metzora, the Torah introduces us to the law commanding a person to go to the priest who determined the nature of his 'plague of leprosy' (nega tzara'at). If the scab was diagnosed as qualifying, the development of the disease required the constant inspection of the priest.

Metzora provides the complex details of the purification process once the disease is over. This ritual requires two kosher birds, a piece of cedar, crimson wool, and a hyssop branch. One bird is slaughtered while the other is ultimately sent away. But this is only the beginning of a purification process that lasts eight days, culminating in a guilt offering brought at the Holy Temple. Only after the entire procedure was concluded could a person be declared ritually clean.

But if this all sounds foreign, complicated and involved, the Biblical concepts appear even stranger when we discover that this "plague of leprosy" is not limited to humans: "God spoke unto Moses and Aaron, saying: 'When you come to the land of Canaan, which I give to you as an inheritance, and I put the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession, then he that owns the house shall come and tell the priest.'" (Leviticus 14:33-35).

How are we to understand that the very same malady – nega tzara'at – that describes what is generally referred to as a leprous ailment of a human being, has the power to also afflict the walls of a house? A person is one thing, but a house suffering a plague of leprosy?!

When we examine the text, we find an interesting distinction between these two species of tzara'at. "The plague of leprosy" that strikes people is presented in straight-forward terms: "If a person shall have in the skin a swelling, a scab, or a bright spot, and it be in the skin of his flesh the plague of leprosy." (Leviticus 13:3)

But the plague that strikes houses is introduced by an entirely different concept: "When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving to you as an

inheritance, I will put the plague of leprosy." (Leviticus 14:34).

Why is the commandment of the plagued house placed in the context of the Land of Israel? If indeed the disease can descend upon houses, why only the houses in the Land of Israel?

A third element to consider are the differences in the visible aspects of these two diseases. Regarding the person himself, the Torah speaks of a white discoloration, but as far as the house is concerned, if a white spot appeared on the wall, nothing would be wrong.

"Then the priest shall command that they empty the house... and he shall look at the plague and behold, if the plague be in the walls and consists of penetrating streaks that are bright green or bright red...." (Leviticus 14:36-37)

We must keep in mind that the translation a "plague of leprosy" is inadequate. Biblical commentaries ranging from the 12th century Ramban to the 19th century Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch claim that nega tzara'at cannot possibly be an illness in the classic sense; for if that were true, why would the Torah assign the 'medical' task of determining illness to a priest? Priests were teachers and keepers of the religious tradition – not doctors or medical experts.

If nega tzara'at is a spiritual illness – a metaphor for the state of the soul – then just as one soul is linked to one body, the souls of the members of a family are linked to the dwelling where they all live together. And the walls of a house certainly reflect the atmosphere engendered by its residents. A house can be either warm or cold, loving or tense. Some houses are ablaze with life, permeating Jewishness and hospitality: mezuzot on the doorposts, candelabra, menoras and Jewish art on the walls, books on Judaism on the shelves, and place-settings for guests always adorning the table.

But in other homes, the silence is so heavy it feels like a living tomb, or the screams of passionate red-hot anger which can be heard outside frighten away any would-be visitor, or the green envy of the residents evident in the gossip they constantly speak causes any guest to feel uncomfortable.

Why should this "disease" be specifically connected to the Land – or more specifically, to the people of Israel?

To find the unique quality of Israel all we have to do is examine the idea of Beit Yisrael, the House of Israel. The nature of a household is that as long as there is mutual love and shared responsibility, then that house will be blessed and its walls won't be struck with a plague of leprosy. To the extent that the covenant of mutual responsibility is embraced by the people, then the house of Israel will be blessed.

We must act toward each other with the same morality, ethics and love present in every blessed

family. If not, a nega tzara'at awaits us. And our holy land of Israel is especially sensitive to any moral infraction. ©2022 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**T**his week's Torah portion remains one of the most mysterious and supernatural demonstrations of the laws of Judaism, which appears anywhere else in the holy books. We are not aware of the specific nature of the disease that is described. Leprosy is certainly not the correct translation or identification of this disease called Tzoraat in the Torah. The cause for the disease, however, is alluded to in Jewish tradition. It apparently stems from the violation of the prohibition against evil speech.

This can be deduced from the fact that one of the miracles that our teacher Moshe was bidden to perform to validate his mission in front of Pharaoh and the Jewish people was to insert his hand into his breast clothing and remove it. That hand turned white with the same disease described in our Parsha as Tzoraat. When he reinserted his hand and then removed it, it returned to its normal strength in color. We also find that Miriam when she was punished for speaking ill against Moshe was stricken with this disease.

In these instances, the Torah makes clear to us that evil speech – Moshe speaking against the Jewish people and saying that they will not believe him, and are unworthy of redemption, and Miriam speaking ill of her brother -- criticizing his handling of his personal domestic life – suffered the punishment of this disease striking them. As such, it became evident in Jewish scholarship that there was a connection between this disease and between speaking ill of others. Nevertheless, this does not explain the nature of this disease, and why it was chosen as being the instrument of punishment and retribution for the sin of evil speech.

We find in the book of Kings and in the works of some of the prophets that this disease struck some of the leaders and kings of Israel during later times as well. The rabbis of the Talmud compared the appearance of Tzoraat on the skin of King Uziah of Judah as being comparable to an earthquake. Apparently, this disease, more than any other physical ailment, was meant to shake up the society and to instill within it proper respect for the word of God and the value system of the Torah.

Since we are unable to identify the disease, it is not part of our daily or even spiritual view of events. The only lesson left to derive from these descriptions of the disease, then, is that heaven is indeed conscious of our thoughts, actions, speech, and behavior. And that these have consequences both for the good and for the better. We also see from the Torah that the expert on this type of event was the Priest-Kohen, and not the

medical doctor, or even the wise scholar of the time. The Kohen was thought to be the prime connection between the judgment of heaven and the behavior of humans. It was, therefore, the High Priest alone who could bring atonement for the Jewish people on the day of Yom Kippur. Spiritual disease comes from spiritual failing, and, therefore, requires the healing effect of spiritual greatness which was bestowed upon the family of Aaron and the Jewish priesthood. ©2022 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**he process of purifying the metzora (a person afflicted by a rare skin disease) is described in the portion of Metzora: "This shall be the law of the metzora in the days of his cleansing: he shall be brought to the priest [v'huva el hakohen]" (Leviticus 14:2).

In the next sentence, however, the priest is described as going out of the camp to the metzora: "v'yatza hakohen el mi'chutz la'machaneh" (14:3). But hasn't the metzora already come to the Kohen?

Perhaps v'huva is not to be taken literally. It's not that the metzora actually comes to the priest but that he feels within himself the readiness to be purified. In this spirit, the Shem mi'Shmuel argues that "only after the metzora has decided to bestir himself, to take positive action leading to repentance and purity, shall 'the priest go forth out of the camp' to purify him."

The idea of spiritual readiness introduces an important lesson: Many in need seek help from God or professionals or friends, but little can happen until one is self-motivated to take the first step. This is true in virtually all areas of rehabilitation. Those who struggle with various addictions – drinking, gambling, drugs, eating disorders – can only turn matters around when they are personally ready to take action.

Note that the Talmud sees Channah as the prototype of how to pray (Berachot 31a). One wonders why the matriarchs were not considered suitable. In truth, the matriarchs never prayed on their own behalf – when they felt a need for prayer, they expected their husbands to pray for them (Rashi, Genesis 16:5; see as well Genesis 25:21, 30:1). Only Channah takes the initiative on her own (I Samuel 1:10–13). She therefore becomes our teacher as the paragon of prayer.

The Talmud tells the story of Elazar ben Durdaya. A sinner, he turned to the mountains and hills, the heavens and the earth, the moon and the sun, asking them to pray for him. They each responded that they were consumed with their own needs. In exasperation, he concluded, "The matter depends on nothing other than myself." And God concurred

(Avodah Zarah 17a).

His story may be the basis of the classic song "Sinnerman." Sinnerman asks the rock, and then the sea, and then the sun for protection. They respond, "You need to help yourself." Finally, Sinnerman turns to God, and the Lord says: "Sinnerman, you should have been a prayin'."

And that is the message of v'huva. The metzora, racked with pain, feels an inner calling to rise up and help himself. Then, and only then, does the priest come forward so that purification can begin. ©2022 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Immersion in the Mikva

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Anyone who has become *tamei*, and anything that has become *tamei* (except for earthenware and food), can become *tahor* again through immersion in a mikvah. The laws of immersion (*tevilah*) are recorded in the Mishnah. However, the Torah uses different words to describe it. The verb used for a person purifying himself with water, such as a leper, is *rachatz* (wash). The instructions for the immersion of an impure item use the verb *chibes* (launder or clean). The *Rishonim* clarify that any time there is a reference in the Torah to washing or cleaning, it is talking about immersion in a mikvah.

One who is required to immerse in a mikvah must recite the blessing of "*Al Ha-tevilah*" ("Who has commanded us regarding immersion"). The reason that we use the expression "*al ha-tevilah*" (literally, on immersion) and not "*litbol*" (to immerse) is because *litbol* implies that immersion is an obligation. That would be incorrect. Immersion in and of itself is not an obligation; one is permitted to remain in a state of impurity (*Rishonim*).

What if a person forgot to recite the blessing? He still emerges spiritually pure after the immersion, since we rule that a mitzva is fulfilled even when its blessing is omitted (*Geonim*).

Ezra's edict, that a man who had a seminal discharge was obligated to immerse in a mikvah, is no longer in effect. If a man does choose to immerse after a seminal emission, should he recite the blessing? This is debated by the *poskim*. Generally, however, the blessing upon immersing in a mikvah is only recited when a woman has immersed after giving birth or completing her menstrual cycle.

As a general rule, blessings are recited before a mitzva is performed (*oveir le-asiyatan*). However, there is a disagreement as to whether this principle applies here. Some argue that even though an impure person is permitted to make blessings, it is preferable

for her to immerse first so that she can recite the blessing while pure. Others insist that the general rule should be followed, and the blessing should be recited before the mitzva is performed. Common practice attempts to integrate both these views. Generally, a person immerses once (emerging pure), then recites the blessing in a state of purity, and then immerses a second time. This way, the blessing precedes the second immersion and may be considered to be done *over le-asiyato*. All in all, a rather clever solution. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

#### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

"This shall be the Law of the Metzora on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the Kohain. And the Kohain shall go to outside of the camp..." (Vayikra 14:2-3) The obvious contradiction here is that first we say the Metzora is brought to the Kohain, and then we say the Kohain goes out to see him. Who is obligated to go to whom and why is it worded so strangely?

The fact of the matter is that a Metzora was not allowed in the camp, so clearly, he could not go to the Kohain. However, since they were supposed to avoid contaminating others, people with tzaraas would often go far from the borders of the camp. Therefore, he would have to "come" to the edge of the camp, and the Kohain would "go out" to examine him.

The syntax of the posuk indicates not that the pers would come, but rather, that s/he would be brought. From this we learn that a Metzora was brought to the Kohain even against his will. If he chose to remain contaminated and live out his life outside the camp, he wasn't given that option. He had to come back and go through the purification process. What was that about?

The Chasam Sofer explains that Hashem, in His limitless mercy, sends suffering to a person in order to arouse them to repentance. The Metzora had sinned and in order to get him to rectify his ways, Hashem sent the tzaraas which caused him to go out of the camp, but also out of his comfort zone. No longer could he continue as before, living without thinking. Now, he was given time alone to think about his actions and his desire to return to civilization would drive him to consider whether he was a good neighbor or whether he'd earned himself this isolation through his failure to respect and appreciate others.

Ideally, the person would recognize the error of their ways, and through the loneliness, begin to appreciate the people in his life. He would come closer to Hashem and grow from his experience. But growth isn't easy, and sometimes people would balk at becoming pure if it meant they had to acknowledge wrongdoing. That's when they would be forced.

They weren't allowed to choose whether they

wanted to become pure, because that choice was made by Hashem. He gave the tzaraas so the person would become better. So he is brought to the Kohain.

Now, however, when the person is ready to go through the procedure, even if his repentance isn't sincere and he's only doing it because he must, we show him compassion. The Kohain goes out to the Metzora, similar to the statement of Chazal that Hashem tells us, "Open for Me (through Teshuva) an opening like the eye of a needle, and I will widen it like the opening of a ballroom." When someone takes the first step to improve, even against their will, we step forward and help them, trying to make it easier.

That's because it his Hashem's will that His children be close to Him, and once they are ready to begin, He wants to help them along. Whether it is us helping someone else, or someone else or even just circumstances helping us, when we decide which way we want to go, Hashem will get us there.

*When Rabbi Eliezer Silver came from America to offer support for his Jewish brethren in the DP camps, he noticed one fellow stood to the side and would not pray with them.*

*"After what I saw in the camps, I can't pray to G-d," he said. "There was someone who smuggled in a Siddur, and would charge people bread rations to use it!"*

*R' Laizer asked him, "Why do you look at the fellow who took bread from others? Look at the amazing people willing to give up their food for a chance to daven from a siddur!" ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

#### **RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

### **The House**

**T**he affliction of tzara'at in a house is separated from the laws of tzara'at on the skin, hair, and clothing by being placed in a separate parasha, Metzora. The Or HaChaim explains that there were no houses in the desert when this mitzvah was given, yet the other tzara'at afflictions had started immediately in the desert. The mitzvah concerning tzara'at in a house was only to apply in a land that was a possession of the B'nei Yisrael, given to them by Hashem, namely Israel. While the punishment for tzara'at is mostly brought about because of lashon hara, gossip, the Gemara explains that there can be many other reasons for the affliction. Our discussion today will concern the procedure upon finding this affliction on the walls of one's house.

The Torah says, "When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I will place a tzara'at affliction upon a house in the land of your possession. The one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the Kohein saying. 'Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house.' The Kohein shall command, and they shall clear the house

before the Kohein comes to see the affliction, so that everything in the house shall not become impure, and afterwards the Kohein shall come and look at the house. He shall look and behold, the affliction is in the walls of the house, depressed, deep greens or deep reds; and their appearance is lower than the wall. The Kohein shall exit from the house to the entrance of the house, and he shall close off the house for a seven-day period. The Kohein shall return on the seventh day, he shall look and behold, the affliction had spread in the walls of the house. The Kohein shall command and they shall remove the stones that contain the affliction, and they shall cast them outside the city onto an impure place. And the house shall be scraped from within, all around; the mortar that they have scraped at the edges they are to pour outside the city onto an impure place. They shall take other stones and bring them in place of the stones; and they shall take other mortar and plaster the house."

The Kli Yakar and the Or HaChaim question why it was necessary to reiterate "in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession." The Or HaChaim explains that this is the reason that the incidents of tzara'at mentioned in the Torah actually occur in reverse order. Once the people came into the land that they were to possess, tzara'at in the house would occur before any of the other incidents. The Kli Yakar also notes that there is a subtle promise made in this pasuk, that Hashem will bring the B'nei Yisrael through the desert and will give them houses to live in once they reach Canaan. It is not unusual for Hashem to lay the foundation for this punishment and to increase its psychological severity by explaining that the house that may need to be destroyed was a gift from Hashem.

According to the Ramban, this is the first incident of tzara'at in a house that will play itself out. This affliction occurs on the outside walls of the house and has not yet spread inside the house. When the Torah continues to discuss a break out within the house, it is a new affliction and is treated as such. "If the affliction returns and erupts in the house after he has removed the stones, after the house has been scraped at the edges, and after it has been plastered. The Kohein shall come and look, and behold, the affliction has spread in the house, it is a degenerative tzara'at in the house, it is impure. He shall demolish the house, its stones, its timber, and all the mortar of the house; they shall take it outside the city to an impure place. Anyone who comes into the house during all the days he has closed it off shall be impure until the evening. But one who reclines in the house shall immerse his garments; and one who eats in the house shall immerse his garments." Here, with this second outbreak, the house must be totally demolished and none of it may be used again in the building of a new home.

In the first incident of tzara'at on the outer walls

of the house, the owner is cautioned to remove his possessions from inside the house before the Kohein examines it. Rashi and the Sifra explain that the owner is given time to rescue his property, for once the Kohein declares it to be tzara'at, everything within the house becomes impure and some items might not have a way to purify them. Even though this loss might be negligible, Hashem wanted to minimize the loss to the owner if he comprehends the warning and changes his behavior. In this way, he may be left with only a small loss of property and minimize his public embarrassment.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the Gemara in Yoma (2b) takes the words of the Torah, "the one to whom the house belongs" and indicates that this is a sign of "social misbehavior which called for the proclamation by an affliction of Hashem's displeasure with the inhabitant of the house." The Gemara criticizes this statement as a sign that the owner views his home exclusively for himself: "he does not want to lend any of his utensils, and says that he has not got the article requested." When he is required to empty his house before the Kohein approaches to make his judgment, everyone will be able to see that he has lied when refusing their requests. Still, the end result of his actions, if he does not change from this behavior, is that his entire house will be torn down and the "possession" which he hoarded will no longer exist. Instead of taking the time to rebuild his character and end the affliction of tzara'at, he will now be forced to rebuild his house and rebuild his character anyway.

It is important to note that the term bayit which is the word for house can also mean one's family. When one establishes a house, one also establishes his family as a permanent resident. Today, people move easily from house to house, city to city, and even country to country. We are less aware of the concept of permanency. Yet the concept of family still applies. We must teach our children to become the type of people worthy of a bayit. One of the blessings that one makes to a new Jewish couple is that they build a bayit ne'eman b'Yisrael, a faithful, trustworthy house among the Jewish people. We must remember that this must be a house which is free of gossip, selfishness, and greed. May each of our homes have solid walls, open to all, a bayit ne'eman b'Yisrael. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

**RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON**

## Perceptions

**W**e have finally arrived at Shabbos HaGadol, b"H. We have also arrived at Parashas Metzora because, thanks to the leap year, they are able to coincide. It would seem, however, as if the two matters have little in common, but they actually have a lot in common. And as is often the case, finding such a connection leads to an important insight that might otherwise had been overlooked.

You will recall that all the way back in Parashas Shemos, when God first approached Moshe about delivering the Jewish people, Moshe challenged God's decision to redeem them claiming they were unworthy. Right or wrong, God did not like what he said and promptly punished Moshe with tzara'as. As Rashi also explains, God indicated to Moshe that by speaking loshon hara he was taking up the profession of the snake who had spoken it about God back in Gan Aiden.

The question is, was all of that just a side story, or was it part of the main story, the story of redemption? The answer is in the name of the holiday itself, Pesach, or rather, peh sach...the mouth that spoke. On a Pshat level Pesach comes from the word posayach, which means to skip over, as in God skipping over the houses of the Jews to kill the Egyptian firstborn. But on a Drush level, it is called Pesach to allude to peh sach, and the role of speech in redemption, both for the Jews in Egypt and later the metzora who spoke loshon hara.

I don't need to explain the importance of speech. You just have to lose it once to realize how central it is to life and getting things done. Words have the power to create and they have the power to destroy, the power to impress and the power to embarrass. As the Zohar says, you can size up a person by the way they speak.

Tradition teaches that the negative space in the letter Peh alludes to the fact that God used speech to make all of Creation. In a Sefer Torah, the negative space in a Peh is the shape of a Bais, the first letter of Bereishis -- Creation. God's peh -- mouth, so-to-speak, spoke all of Creation into existence.

The world picked up on this idea and started using words to manipulate reality, or at least make movies in which people do that by uttering some phrase or incantation. Balak complimented Bilaam by saying that "whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed." You can fire a gun at a person, but if they're too far, you will miss. But if you target them with words, you can be thousands of miles away and still hit a bullseye, for good or for bad.

Thus the word dibur -- word -- has the same root as dever, which means plague, which tzara'as is also called. Both can originate with something very small and spread far and wide, leaving death and destruction in their wake. The only difference between the two words is that dibur also has the letters Yud and Vav.

Another example of this is the words suffek and sippuk, doubt and satiation. One of the most dissatisfying feelings we have in life is doubt because it freezes us from moving forward. Amalek, the nemesis of God and the Jewish people, equals suffek in gematria because that's what Amalek is famous for, creating doubt in Divine Providence.

But add a Yud and Vav to suffek and it

becomes sippuk, something a person can only truly have when they are real with the reality of God. This is why people who are in doubt about God in their lives have to indulge so many material pleasures. Contrary to popular knowledge, God is the pleasure of all pleasure, and lacking that, we are forced to seek lesser forms of it of the material type.

This is why Dovid HaMelech was able to write love songs about God even while God had him chased around by Shaul HaMelech and other enemies, including his own son at one point. He never doubted God's love for him, and that was enough for him in life, as he wrote:

One [thing] I ask of God, that I seek: that I may dwell in the house of God all the days of my life, to see the pleasantness of God and to visit His Temple every morning. That He will hide me in His tabernacle on the day of calamity; He will conceal me in the secrecy of His tent; He will lift me up on a rock. (Tehillim 27:4-5)

The question is, what significance, if any, do these two particular letters, Yud and Vav, have?

Off the top, these letters are special because they are the first and third letters of the Shem Hovayah, God's name that we do not pronounce the way it is written. This is the name of God that Pharaoh was introduced to the hard way, via the Ten Plagues.

In this name the Yud corresponds to the sefirah of Chochmah, and the Vav corresponds to the six sefiros of Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod. The first Heh between the Yud and the Vav corresponds to Binah, and the last Heh after the Vav corresponds to the sefirah of Malchus, the actual level of our world.

This is not the place to go into a detailed discussion about the sefiros, which I have done several times in several of my books. (Besides, today you can google it (Sefirot) and get some good background.) For now, the sefiros are the spiritual entities that God created and used to make Creation, and continues to use to sustain everything as per His will, every moment of existence.

Our history is governed by those six sefiros, the first one thousand years by Chesed, the second by Gevurah, etc. We're in the sixth millennium, so our millennium is governed by the sixth sefirah of Yesod, which basically dictates all the potential for our history, the good and the bad. So, these six sefiros represent what you might call the stage of life, where the light of the abstract world of Chochmah is actualized through Creation and human activity.

I know this is all quite kabbalistic, but the ending is quite down to earth, b"H.

The four levels represented by the four letters of God's name correspond to different members of the family. The Yud -- Chochmah -- corresponds to a father, the Heh -- Binah -- to a mother, the Vav -- Zehr Anpin (Chesed through Yesod) to a son, and the final

Heh -- Malchus -- to his bride. Together they are like one happy family when all the light flows as it should from top to bottom, of which we are the final recipients.

Even though a mother is usually between a father and a son, taking what the father "brings in" and filtering it for the children, there is a special direct relationship between a father and son, just as there is between a mother and a daughter, or in the case of the sefiros, a daughter-in-law. Secular society may be doing its own thing once again when it comes to gender differentiation, but it is set in the sefiros. Zehr Anpin, like many actual sons, has a special and direct connection to Chochmah -- Wisdom -- the "father" by virtue of its builtin similarity to it.

When that is maintained, the wisdom of Chochmah flows down to the world of Zehr Anpin, and never becomes dibur, suffek becomes sippuk, and potential destruction instead becomes creation. When the opposite is true, then the opposite is true, and you get intellectual and spiritual confusion and, eventually destruction of the world and mankind, God forbid.

In this way, dibur represents redemption and never represents exile. How we speak, what comes out of our mouths is the ultimate measurement as to how much a person is truly liberated, and how much they are actually oppressed by their yetzer hara. There are a lot of people today who think they are free, but they are actually quite enslaved to their evil inclinations. Because of them the Vav does not receive the wisdom of the Yud. As the rabbis warned, truth will be lacking right before Moshiach comes (Sotah 49b). This is the reason why. ©2022 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

#### DAN LIFSHITZ

### Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Metzora discusses the subject of a supernatural discoloration of the walls of a house that renders the house and its contents ritually impure. An individual who suspects such a problem in his house must go to a kohen and say "it appears like I have a nega in the house". They must go themselves, and cannot send an agent. The Ktav Sofer points out that the phrase "the house" is somewhat inappropriate in this context, especially given the fact that the owner must go himself. We would have expected the phrase to read "in MY house" not "THE house."

The Ktav Sofer explains the choice of words: The Sages teach that house discolorations is a punishment intended to help make stingy people more generous. Many details of its laws serve this purpose. Even the choice of words reinforces this message. To a stingy person, it is MY house, MY car, MY money. The Torah requires this person to say "in THE house" to begin teaching them that their possessions are not truly theirs, but rather gifts from G-d with which to do good. ©2014 D. Lifshitz and LeLamed, Inc.

