

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The disease known as leprosy engendered dread in the hearts of people especially in the past, when it was apparently more widespread and exceedingly contagious. In Biblical times, the priests (Kohanim) would determine whether a skin discoloration or scab was indeed leprosy - and if so, the hapless leper would be rendered ritually impure and exiled from society. From the Biblical religious perspective, tzara'at emanated from a serious moral deficiency, generally identified as slander (the Hebrew metzora - generally translated as leper - may be taken as a contraction of two words, motzi-ra, to speak out evil words).

An especially problematic aspect of these laws of tzara'at is the fact that not only individuals but even walls of houses could become infected by this ritually impure discoloration, and that - even stranger still - the Bible describes the phenomenon of "leprosy of houses" in almost positive, gift-of-G-d terms: "And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, 'when you come into the Land of Canaan which I give to you as an inheritance and I shall give you the plague of leprosy in the houses of the land of your inheritance'" (Leviticus 14:34). How are we to understand this Biblical reference to the "divine gift" of leprosy walls?

Nachmanides, the twelfth century commentator who championed the unique importance of the land of Israel for the people of Israel, sees the phenomenon of the leprosy walls as an expression of the intensely concentrated moral sensitivity of our Holy Land: the sanctity of Israel, home of the Divine Presence (Shekhina). This land cannot abide within its boundaries a home in which slander is spoken; hence, the walls of such a house will naturally show the effects of words of gossip, which can destroy lives.

Maimonides sees another benefit to the "leprosy of the homes," an explicit warning to desist from speaking slander: "This is a sign and a wonder to warn people against indulging in malicious speech (lashon hara). If they do recount slanderous tales, the walls of their homes will change; and if the inhabitants maintain their wickedness, the garments upon them will change" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Impurity of Tzaraat, 16,10).

Rashi, the commentary par excellence and most authentic representative of the view of the

Talmudic and Midrashic Sages, suggests a practical application for the "gift of the leprosy walls." He writes, "It was a happy tidings for them when the plague [of leprosy] came upon [their homes]. This is because the Amorite Canaanites had hidden treasures of gold in the walls of their homes during the forty years when Israel was in the desert, and because of the leprosy plagues the walls were taken apart and [the treasures] were found" (Rashi, Leviticus 14:34).

I would suggest that Rashi's commentary may be given a figurative rather than a literal understanding. The walls of a house represent a family, the family which inhabits that house, and every family has its own individual culture and climate, scents and sensitivities, tales and traditions. A house may also represent many generations of families who lived there, the values, faith commitments and lifestyles which animated them and constituted their continuity. The sounds, smells and songs, the character, culture and commitments which are absorbed - and expressed - by the walls of a house, are indeed a treasure which is worthy of discovery and exploration. The walls of a home impart powerful lessons; hidden in those walls is a significant treasure trove of memories and messages for the present and future generations. Perhaps it is for this reason that the nation of Israel is called the house of Israel throughout the Bible.

From this perspective we can now understand the Biblical introduction to "house-leprosy." This hidden power of the walls is a present as well as a plague, a gift as well as a curse. Do the walls emit the fragrance of Shabbat challah baking in the oven or the smells of cheap liquor? Are the sounds seeping through the crevices sounds of Torah, prayer and affection or sounds of tale-bearing, porn and anger? The good news inherent in the leprosy of the walls is the potency of family; the very same home environment which can be so injurious can also be exceedingly beneficial, it all depends upon the "culture of the table" which the family creates and which the walls absorb!

With this understanding, it is instructive to note the specific colorations - or discolorations - which render the walls ritually unclean: "And he [the Kohen - Priest] shall examine the leprosy plague penetratingly embedded in the walls of the house, whether they are bright green or bright red" (Leviticus 14:37). Can it be that green is identified with money (yerukim in modern Hebrew, an apt description of American dollars) and red identified with blood? A home which imparts

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materialistic goals as the ideal and/or insensitivity to the shedding of blood - and remember that our sages compared slander or character assassination to the shedding of blood - certainly deserves the badge of impurity!

And finally, Rashi suggested that there was an Amorite-Canaanite treasure which the inhabitants placed in the walls of their homes in Israel when the Israelites dallied in the desert rejecting the different challenge of the conquest of Israel. Might not this interpretation be suggesting that the indigenous seven nations had a treasure which they impart to their children through the walls of the houses? This treasure is the belief that land is important, that a connection to the land is cardinal for every nation which claims a homeland and respects its past. The land must be important enough to fight and even to die for, since it contains the seed of our eternity; only those committed to their past deserve to enjoy a blessed future.

I am certainly not suggesting terrorism against innocent citizens and nihilistic, Moloch-like suicide bombing, which proves not love of land but rather universal rejection of life and destruction of fundamental humanistic values. Post-Zionism was forgetting the indelible linkage between a nation and its land as an expression of its commitment to eternal ideals and the continuity between its past and future. Tragically, we have only learned as a united nation to appreciate the importance of our homeland when the Palestinian suicide attackers threatened to take it away from us by their vicious attacks. But sacred lessons can be learned - even from the purveyors of impurity. © 2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah which we read in conjunction with Parshas Hachodesh portrays the upcoming month of Nissan in a brilliant light. It begins with an elaborate description of the special sacrifices which will introduce the Messianic era. The prophet Yechezkel focuses on the dedication of the third Bais Hamikdash and says, "On the first day of the first month(Nissan) take a perfect bullock and purify the Bais Hamikdash." (45:18) The Radak (ad loc.) notes that the Jewish nation will return to Eretz Yisroel long before this.

During that time most of the construction of the Bais Hamikdash will be completed leaving only final stages for the month of Nissan. Radak suggests that the inaugural services will begin seven days prior to the month of Nissan and will conclude on Rosh Chodesh itself. He offers with this an interpretation to the classic saying of Chazal "In Nissan we were redeemed and in Nissan we are destined to be redeemed." These words, in his opinion, refer to the events of our Haftorah wherein we are informed that the service in the Bais Hamikdash will begin in the month of Nissan.

As we follow these dates closely, we discover a striking similarity between the dedication of the final Bais Hamikdash and of the Mishkan. Historically speaking, each of them revolves around the month of Nissan. In fact, as we have discovered, they are both completed on the exact same date, Rosh Chodesh Nissan. But this specific date reveals a more meaningful dimension to these dedications. The month of Nissan, as we know, has special significance to the Jewish people; it marks our redemption from Egyptian bondage. In truth, this redemption process began on the first day of Nissan. Because, as we discover in this week's Maftir reading, Hashem began preparing the Jewish people for their redemption on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. All of this indicates a direct corollary between the Jewish people's redemption and the erection of the Sanctuary and the final Bais Hamikdash. Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the date which introduced our redemption and afterwards our service in the Mishkan will ultimately introduce the service of the final Bais Hamikdash.

In search for an understanding of this, we refer to Nachmanides' insightful overview to Sefer Shmos. In essence, the Sefer of Shmos spans the Jewish people's exile and redemption. It begins with the descent of Yaakov and his household to Egypt and concludes with the exodus of our entire nation. Yet, almost half of the sefer is devoted to the intricacies of the Sanctuary, something seemingly unrelated to redemption! Nachmanides explains that the Jewish redemption extended far beyond the physical boundaries of Egypt. Before they left the land of Israel, Yaakov and his sons enjoyed a close relationship with Hashem. The devotion of the Patriarchs had produced such an intense level of sanctity that Hashem's presence was commonplace amongst them. However with their descent to Egypt, this experience faded away and, to some degree, distance developed between themselves and Hashem. Over the hundreds of years in Egypt, this distance grew and they eventually lost all association with Him. Nachmanides explains that even after their liberation from Egyptian bondage, scars of exile remained deeply imprinted on them. Having left Egypt, they began rebuilding their relationship with Hashem and prepared for a long journey homeward to Him. Finally, with the erection of the Sanctuary, they reached their ultimate destiny and reunited with Hashem. The Sanctuary

created a tangible experience of Hashem's presence amongst them, the clearest indication of His reunification with them. With this final development, the Jewish people's redemption was complete. They now returned to the status of the Patriarchs, and were totally bound to their Creator. All scars of their exile disappeared and they could now, enjoy the closest relationship with their beloved, Hashem.

This perspective is best reflected in the words of Chazal in P'sikta Rabsi. Our Chazal inform us that, in reality, all the segments of the Sanctuary were already completed in the month of Kislev. However, Hashem waited until Nissan which is called "the month of the Patriarchs", for the erection and inauguration of the Mishkan. With the insight of Nachmanides we can appreciate the message of this P'sikta. As stated, the erection of the Sanctuary represented the completion of our Jewish redemption, their reunification with Hashem. In fact, this unification was so intense that it was tantamount to the glorious relationship of the Patriarchs and Hashem. In essence this present Jewish status reflected that of the Patriarchs in whose merit this relationship had been reinstated. It was therefore only proper to wait until Nissan for the dedication of the Sanctuary. Nissan which was the month of the Patriarchs was reserved for this dedication, because it reflected the Jewish people's parallel level to the Patriarchs themselves.

In this week's Haftorah, we discover that this concept will continue into the Messianic era and the inauguration of the final Bais Hamikdash. Our ultimate redemption, as in our previous ones, will not be considered complete until we merit the Divine Presence in our midst. Even after our return to Eretz Yisroel, which will transpire long before Nissan, we will continue to bear the scar tissue of thousands of years of exile. Only after Hashem returns to us resting His presence amongst us will we truly be redeemed. This magnificent revelation will, quite obviously, occur in the month of Nissan. Our final redemption which reflects Hashem's return to His people will join the ranks of our redemptions and be introduced on that glorious day, Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

May we learn from them to totally subjugate ourselves to our Creator, thereby meriting the final and total destruction of Amalek and his followers. © 2011 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It was the Septuagint, the early Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, that translated tsaraat, the condition whose identification and cleansing occupies much of Tazria and Metsora as lepra, giving rise to a long tradition identifying it with leprosy.

That tradition is now widely acknowledged to be incorrect. First, the condition described in the Torah

simply does not fit the symptoms of leprosy. Second, the Torah applies it not only to various skin conditions but also to mildew on clothes and the walls of houses, which certainly rules out any known disease. The Rambam puts it best: "Tsaraat is a comprehensive term covering a number of dissimilar conditions. Thus whiteness in a person's skin is called tsaraat. The falling off of some of his hair on the head or the chin is called tsaraat. A change of colour in garments or in houses is called tsaraat." (Hilkhos Tumat Tsaraat 16: 10)

Seeking to identify the nature of the phenomenon, the sages sought for clues elsewhere in the Torah and found them readily available. Miriam was smitten by tsaraat for speaking badly about her brother Moses (Num. 12: 10). The Torah later gives special emphasis to this event, seeing in it a warning for all generations: "Be careful with regard to the plague of tsaraat . . . Remember what the Lord your G-d did to Miriam along the way after you came out of Egypt" (Deut. 24: 8-9).

It was, in other words, no normal phenomenon but a specific divine punishment for lashon hara, evil speech. The rabbis drew attention to the verbal similarity between metsora, a person afflicted by the condition, and motzi shem ra, someone guilty of slander.

Rambam, on the basis of rabbinic traditions, gives a brilliant account of why tsaraat afflicted both inanimate objects like walls and clothes, and human beings:

It [tsaraat] was a sign and wonder among the Israelites to warn them against slanderous speaking. For if a man uttered slander, the walls of his house would suffer a change. If he repented, the house would again become clean. But if he continued in his wickedness until the house was torn down, leather objects in his house on which he sat or lay would suffer a change. If he repented they would again become clean. But if he continued in his wickedness until they were burned, the garments which he wore would suffer a change. If he repented they would again become clean. But if he continued in his wickedness until they were burned, his skin would suffer a change and he would become infected by tsaraat and be set apart and alone until he no more engaged in the conversation of the wicked which is scoffing and slander. (Hilkhos Tumat Tsaraat 16: 10)

The most compelling illustration of what the tradition is speaking about when it talks of the gravity of motsi shem ra, slander, and lashon hara, evil speech, is Shakespeare's tragedy Othello. Iago, a high ranking soldier, is bitterly resentful of Othello, a Moorish general in the army of Venice. Othello has promoted a younger man, Cassio, over the more experienced Iago, who is determined to take revenge. He does so in a prolonged and vicious campaign, which involves among other things tricking Othello into the suspicion that his wife, Desdemona, is having an adulterous affair with Cassio.

Othello asks Iago to kill Cassio, and he himself kills Desdemona, smothering her in her bed. Emilia, Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant, discovers her mistress dead and as Othello explains why he has killed her, realises the nature of her husband's plot and exposes it. Othello, in guilt and grief, commits suicide, while Iago is arrested and taken to be tortured and possibly executed.

It is a play entirely about the evil of slander and suspicion, and portrays literally what the sages said figuratively, that "Evil speech kills three people: the one who says it, the one who listens to it, and the one about whom it is said" (Arakin 15b).

Shakespeare's tragedy makes it painfully clear how much evil speech lives in the dark corners of suspicion. Had the others known what Iago was saying to stir up fear and distrust, the facts might have become known and the tragedy averted. As it was, he was able to mislead the various characters, playing on their emotional weaknesses and envy, getting each to believe the worst about one another. It ends in serial bloodshed and disaster.

Hence the poetic justice Jewish tradition attributes to one of the least poetic of biblical passages, the laws relating to skin diseases and mildew. The slanderer spreads his lies in private, but his evil is exposed in public. First the walls of his house proclaim his sin, then the leather objects on which he sits, then his clothes, and eventually his skin itself. He is condemned to the humiliation of isolation:

'Unclean! Unclean!' he must call out . . . Since he is unclean, he must remain alone, and his place shall be outside the camp. (Lev. 13: 45-46)

Said the rabbis: Because his words separated husband from wife and brother from brother, his punishment is that he is separated from human contact and made an outcast from society (Arakhin 16b).

At its highest, WikiLeaks aims at being today's functional equivalent of the law of the metsora: an attempt to make public the discreditable things people do and say in private. The sages said about evil speech that it was as bad as idolatry, incest and murder combined, and it was Shakespeare's genius to show us one dramatic way in which it can contaminate human relationships, turning people against one another with tragic consequences.

Never say or do in private what you would be ashamed to read about on the front page of tomorrow's newspapers. That is the basic theme of the law of tsaraat, updated to today. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

There are many who believe that Jewish law links a menstruating woman (niddah) with that which is dirty. This because the word tameh, associated

with the niddah (see for example this week's portion Leviticus 12:2) is often defined as unclean.

If this were true, taharah, the antonym of tumah, would by implication be synonymous with cleanliness. However, Phinehas ben Jair, in a famous comment which was to contribute the outline of Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto's "The Path of the Just" (Mesillat Yesharim), said that Torah, precision, zeal, cleanliness, restraint, taharah, saintliness, meekness, and fear of sin in that order lead to holiness. We learn from this statement that cleanliness and taharah are two distinct categories. So too, is physical uncleanliness not synonymous with tumah.

The truth is that there are several terms in the Torah that have no suitable English equivalent. Such terms should not be translated. Leaving them in the original Hebrew makes the reader understand that a more detailed analysis of the word is necessary. Tumah is one of those words that cannot be perfectly translated and requires a deeper analysis.

Rav Ahron Soloveichik suggested that the real meaning of tumah might be derived from the verse in Psalms, which says: "The fear of the Lord is tehorah, enduring forever." (Psalms 19:10) Taharah therefore means that which is everlasting and never deteriorates. Tumah, the antithesis of taharah, stands for mortality or finitude, that which withers away.

A dead body is considered a primary source of tumah, for it represents decay in the highest sense not only because the corpse itself is in the process of decaying, but also because the living individual who comes into contact with the corpse usually suffers emotionally and endures a form of spiritual fragmentation, a counterpart of the corpse's physical falling away.

The metzora (leper) whose body is encompassed with skin lesions is also considered in a state of tumah. The leper is tameh because he is slowly disintegrating, while those who associate with him decline emotionally as they observe the wasting away of another human being.

The ba'al keri (one who has had a seminal issue) and the niddah may fall into the same framework for they represent in the strictest sense the loss of potential life.

No wonder, then, the process of purification involves immersion in the mikveh, a natural body of water. This because, water is the clearest symbol of life—an appropriate spiritual antidote to tumah, which is nothing, less than what Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik described as "the whisper of death."

As much as we have tried to teach the real meaning of tumat niddah, there are still so many who believe that halakhah links niddah with that which is dirty. This myth must be shattered, a myth that has made it emotionally difficult for many women to accept the laws of family purity. An appropriate understanding of niddah may lead to a greater observance of these

important laws. © 2011 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.

DAN LIFSHITZ

Weekly Dvar

The primary subject of Parshat Tazria is tzara'at, a supernatural skin disease that, according to the Sages, was a punishment for speaking ill about other people. A person who habitually spoke ill about others would be struck with tzara'at and would then be quarantined outside the city as a divine warning to improve their behavior and make themselves more worthy of dwelling within the community. Although the symptoms of tzara'at were fairly straightforward, the official diagnosis could only be made by a kohen, who would declare whether a given patch of skin contained tzara'at or not. The Torah describes one type of skin lesion called a "bohak" that is not tzara'at, but is required to be shown to a kohen as well. R' Moshe Feinstein asks about the purpose of this-if it is not tzara'at, why does the Torah trouble people to show it to the kohen?

R' Moshe Feinstein explains based on the insight mentioned earlier. The purpose of tzara'at is to cause a person to evaluate their behavior and to make improvements. The trauma of being quarantined outside the city for a week or more is clearly a strong catalyst for such self-examination, similar to the way serious illness or loss of a job triggers self-examination in our day. But we must not wait for such dramatic events to examine our actions. The law of the bohak teaches us that even smaller events in our lives should be seen as catalysts for introspection and self-improvement. We can never know for certain what messages G-d is trying to send us, but we should always be listening, whether the message is loud or not. © 2011 D. Lifshitz and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah's concept of cleanliness and uncleanness, of purity and defilement, differs greatly from our ordinarily accepted notions and definitions. We appreciate the necessity for physical cleanliness. So does the Torah. Having a clean body is one of the prerequisites for acceptable prayer and performance of any of the mitzvot. It is also part of our requirement to honor our bodies and to show respect and consideration for other human beings as well.

But that is not the thrust of the cleanliness and purity that the Torah indicates in this week's parsha. The Torah speaks of a type of uncleanness of spirit and soul that somehow manifests itself physically. This type of spiritual uncleanness stems from human

behavior that violates Torah principles and values-especially evil speech.

This type of behavior sullies our souls. In Biblical times the physical effects of such behavior could literally be seen on one's body. Painful and ignominious as the skin eruption was, it had a positive result of warning one as to the consequences of one's negative behavior and speech.

In our time this physical manifestation and warning is no longer present. But the dreadful process of damaging our souls by such behavior and speech continues to apply even today. We say in our prayers daily that the Lord granted us at the beginning of our lives a soul that was pure. When we return it to our Maker we should try to return it as close to its original state as possible. That is in effect what the entire parsha of Tazria is about.

The task entrusted to the kohein was to somehow assess the damage, if any, done to the soul. He had the expertise to be able to do so simply by examining the physical body of the person. It was one of the gifts of the kohein. He possessed such an ability to discern spiritual damage from viewing external symptoms. Apparently a holy person is able to do so.

Legend has it that the famed ARI (Rabbi Isaac Luria of sixteenth century Safed) was able to tell a person what one's sins and spiritual defects were simply by looking at the person's face. Legend also tells us that, because of this power, people rarely visited or conversed with him. We are reticent to know the real truth about ourselves and the state of our souls.

In Biblical times the Lord, so to speak, forced us by physical symptoms to come to the kohein and confront our true spiritual state. This was a blessing, albeit in disguise, for it allowed for the necessary diagnosis that could eventually lead to spiritual repair, improvement and advancement. This is the supreme task of the kohein in helping others achieve their betterment. It was therefore a spiritual experience of advancement for the kohein as well. Helping others always helps to cleanse one's soul and advance one's spirit. © 2011 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

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week's parsha, Tazria, begins with the laws of a woman who gave birth. Upon giving birth to a male, a woman is t'mayah {ritually impure} for a seven-day period. If she gave birth to a female, her period of impurity extends for fourteen days. The possukim {verses} then enumerate the sacrifices brought for a baby boy at the end of forty days and for a baby girl at the end of eighty days.

Many find difficulty with this concept of a woman becoming t'mayah after birth. They erroneously see this as an implication that birth is in some way 'dirty' and thereby brings on impurity. The fact that this period of impurity is double when a girl is born further exacerbates this perception.

In order to properly understand this we must gain a proper understanding of the concept of tum'ah {ritual impurity}.

Tum'ah does not seem to work according to the rules that we'd assume would apply. Animals have no tum'ah during their lifetime, human beings do. Furthermore, upon death a Jew has a greater level of tum'ah than a gentile.

The commentators explain that when an existing kedusha {holiness} departs, a vacuum is formed. That void which is created is immediately filled with tum'ah. The greater the level of kedusha, the greater the degree of tum'ah that will fill the void.

During one's lifetime, one has tremendous potential to bring 'tov' {good} and holiness to this world. While asleep, a person is incapable of performing any such acts. As a result, a 'ruach rah', a certain degree of tum'ah, sets in to fill the void formed by that lack of potential. Upon awakening, that potential kedusha returns. The ruach rah is pushed to the fingers and n'tilas yadayim {the ritual washing of the hands} is performed in order to remove that ruach rah.

The Talmud teaches that sleep is 1/60th of death. That temporary state of inability experienced during sleep becomes permanent at death. At that permanent state of inability the tum'ah sets in at a far greater level. The greater the potential for bringing tov into this world during life, the greater the vacuum that is created at death and filled with tum'ah. The corpse of a Jew therefore has a greater degree of tum'ah than that of a gentile.

Now lets see how this can be applied to the tum'ah of a woman after childbirth.

Our goal is to become as similar to Hashem as we can. "Just as He is compassionate, so too must you be compassionate..." Our life goal and project is to emulate Him to the best of our ability.

If we were to choose one word to best describe the unique character of Hashem, an excellent choice would be 'Creator.' At what point does a human being moves as close as possible to becoming a 'creator'? A woman at childbirth! At that time she is as 'G-d-like' as we ever can be. However, after birth she is no longer in that state. That kedusha is no longer there. A vacuum is formed- she becomes t'mayah.

Why is the period of tum'ah twice as long after a baby girl is born? Because she created a being which has the potential to create. She created a creator. However, once the birth had been completed, she is no longer in that state. The drop is that much more precipitous-the void is that much greater. She is t'mayah for twice as long.

People have feelings of emptiness and voids at different points of their lives. Perhaps these are the tangible stirrings of the vacuum created black of connection to holiness-the holiness for which we were created. May we merit to fill that void with the types of acts which make us most similar to our Creator. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the one with tzora'as, who has this [skin] affliction, his clothes shall be ripped, and his head shall be loose (with long hair), and over his mustache shall be covered, and 'impure, impure' he shall call. All the days that the affliction is upon him he shall be impure-he is impure; he shall dwell alone-outside the encampment is his dwelling place." These verses (Vayikra 13:45-46) describe the status of someone who has tzora'as, the skin condition that is the subject of the vast majority of this week's Parasha. The amount of time/space the Torah spends on tzora'as (in this week's Parasha and next week's) indicates that there might be a fundamental message inherent in this condition, what brings it about, how it is "diagnosed," how it is "treated," and/or how we "recover" from it.

Rabbeinu Bachye (13:47) says that this condition is not a naturally occurring phenomenon, as this condition also occurs in clothing (13:47-59) and on buildings (14:33-53), which are not living beings. Ramban (13:47) only mentions that the tzora'as that afflicts clothing and buildings is not natural; Chasam Sofer (in 5589) said that this also must be true for the tzora'as that afflicts humans (as if G-d causes tzora'as miraculously and specifically to afflict someone's clothing and/or house to send a message, certainly the tzora'as that afflicts his body must be similarly unnatural-and intended). [Support for this "kal v'chomer" can be found in Chazal (see Midrash HaGadol 14:32), quoted by Rambam (Laws of Tzora'as 16:10), which describes the order in which G-d sends a message to a sinner that he must repent. First, G-d afflicts his house. If the message is not taken to heart, his leather furniture is afflicted, followed by his clothing. If the sinning continues, tzora'as occurs on his body, requiring the sinner to separate from the community until he repents. If the tzora'as that affected the body was a naturally occurring phenomenon even though the tzora'as that afflicts houses, leather, and clothing was not, how could it be described as coming after the miraculous types of tzora'as? Only if it were also miraculous could it be considered as part of the same continuum.

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, z"l (Emes L'Yaakov) says that this disease cannot be a medical condition and/or contagious (see <http://aishdas.org/ta/5765/tazria.pdf>, page 4), as there are circumstances where we delay having the kohain examine the skin condition to see if it is indeed tzora'as (such as during a

holiday or during the first week of marriage, see Rambam's Laws of Tzora'as 9:8), thereby exposing others to a person who potentially has tzora'as rather than separating him from the community. If tzora'as was a naturally occurring condition, we wouldn't risk the possibly of it spreading to others. Separating from others until the condition "heals" must therefore not be in order to prevent others from being exposed to it, but to provide the afflicted with a forced introspection whereby he can figure out what must change/improve, and how to implement it. Calling out "impure, impure" must similarly not be a warning to stay away so no one else catches this affliction, but a warning to stay away so as not to be exposed to ritual impurity.

Nevertheless, there are commentators that understand tzora'as as a physical condition that can spread to others (see Ibn Ezra, 13:2 and Chizkuni, 13:46). If it is contagious, how can we delay bringing a potentially afflicted person to a kohain just to avoid adversely affecting his state of happiness during times when he is supposed to be happy? Is personal happiness so important that we risk spreading tzora'as to others in order to avoid affecting it? What about the happiness of those who might become infected with tzora'as as a result?

Towards the end of his commentary on 13:3, Ramban explains why sometimes the Torah refers to the condition under discussion as "an affliction of tzora'as" ("nega tzora'as") and sometimes just as "tzora'as." If it is described as an "affliction of tzora'as" it is not yet tzora'as, but will likely develop into tzora'as, "and the Torah wanted [the Nation of] Israel to be ritually pure and to have clean (read: healthy) bodies, (and) [so] distanced this disease at an early stage." If, however, the Torah refers to it as just "tzora'as" (and not "an affliction of tzora'as"), it has already reached the stage of being full-fledged tzora'as. By mentioning both aspects, ritual impurity and physical sickness, Ramban indicates that both are at work here; the affliction is a physical affliction that can harm others physically, as well as spreading ritual impurity. However, since the Torah mandates that the afflicted be separated even before the condition becomes full-fledged tzora'as, it can be suggested that we can wait for the kohain to proclaim him "impure" (not "sick," but "impure," with a condition that will likely become a "sickness") before actually separating him, and delay this "diagnosis" until after the holiday (or the week of his marriage), since we have time before the physical condition develops into one that can spread to others. Although the "impurity" starts as soon as the kohain declares him "tamay" (ritually impure), since the contagiousness doesn't start just yet, we have some leeway before having to separate him from others.

This may explain how, even if tzora'as is (also) a physical condition, we can sometimes wait before having to physically seclude the afflicted. However, it raises another issue: How can Ramban say that the

tzora'as of clothing and buildings "is not natural at all, and does not exist in the (natural) world," which, as we have seen, is part of the same continuum as the tzora'as that afflicts the body, if he agrees that physical separation from the afflicted is necessary in order to prevent others from getting the affliction? Ramban himself includes tzora'as of the body with the others when he continues: "When Israel is complete with G-d, the spirit of G-d will be upon them constantly to sustain their bodies and their clothing and their houses with a good appearance; (and) [but] if sin and iniquity happens to one of them, an ugliness will occur in his flesh or in his clothing or in his house to indicate that G-d has turned away from him." If tzora'as, all tzora'as, only occurs as a result of sin, and is not natural, why is there a fear of it being contagious?

It could be suggested that tzora'as on the body does occur naturally; it is only on clothing and on buildings that it can only occur miraculously. When we, as a nation, are worthy of G-d's divine presence resting upon us, and are therefore being divinely protected from all bad things, unless there is "sin and iniquity" no type of tzora'as can affect us, neither the type that can occur naturally or the type that can only occur miraculously. However, when we don't merit divine protection, we are susceptible to things affecting us even if we did not deserve that specific consequence (see Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachye on Beraishis 18:19 and Ramban on Iyov 36:7). Under those circumstances, if tzora'as affects one person (whether it was divinely decreed as a specific punishment, or that person was unworthy of divine protection and caught it naturally), we are afraid that it could spread to others who are not worthy of divine protection-and therefore susceptible to also getting tzora'as-and we try to isolate the one who is afflicted so that no one else gets it too. Nevertheless, I think something deeper is at play here.

When discussing the importance of the miracles that occurred when G-d took us out of Egypt, Ramban writes (Shemos 13:16) that "from the great and obvious miracles, a person recognizes the hidden miracles, which are the foundation of the entire Torah. For no person has any part in/of the Torah of Moshe until they believe that everything that happens to us are all miracles, without having any [internal] nature or natural order, whether [it occurs] to many people or to an individual." As previously implied, Ramban is of the opinion that only the very righteous merit divine protection, which manifests itself by G-d getting involved in everything that happens to that individual ("hashgacha p'ratis"); the rest of us are not worthy of such protection, and even things that weren't decreed specifically because of how it would affect us, can affect us. We are subject to the consequences of the decrees G-d made for the world in general ("hashgacha k'lalis"), as well as the consequences of decrees issued specifically for others (a sort of collateral damage) and the consequences of the choices made by others

through their free will. Being vulnerable to the consequences of actions or decrees not intended to specifically affect us ("mikreh") is a form of punishment for not being worthy of divine protection (see Meiri, Sotah 2a).

The context of Ramban's discussion (see also Rabbeinu Bachye's introduction to Parashas Ki Sisa) is comparing our beliefs with other beliefs, including those who believe that G-d is too great to concern Himself with us. Ramban therefore tells us that not only is G-d involved in His world, as evidenced by explicit miracles, but that even those things that are so reliable, consistent and predictable that we view them as "laws of nature" are really just as miraculous; it is only because we are used to them that we don't easily see G-d's hand in them. As Rav Dessler, z"l described it (Michtav Mei'Eliyahu I, page 178), based on the Talmud (Ta'anis 25a), it is not a bigger miracle for oil to burn than for any other liquid to burn; because G-d (almost) always makes oil burn, we call that "natural," and don't give it much thought.

Tzora'as is unique in that in certain circumstances (such as on clothing and on buildings), it is clearly unnatural, while in others (on the human body) it seems very natural. So natural, that if someone gets tzora'as, we must separate him from the community so that it doesn't spread. The fact that this very same affliction can be so obviously unnatural and yet seem to be natural illustrates for us that everything we perceive as being natural really isn't. And since this is the "foundation of the entire Torah," the Torah spends so much time/space describing tzora'as in detail, illustrating the lack of divide between the obvious miracles and the hidden ones. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Contributing Editor: Daniel Dadusc

The rest of the oil that is on the kohen's palm, he shall place upon the head of the person being purified; in order to bring him to atonement before Hashem." (14:29)

R' Meir Simcha Hakohen of Dvinsk (died 1926) asks: Regarding the sacrificial offering of a wealthy person who has been struck with tzara'at, the Torah says (14:20), "The kohen brings him atonement." This implies that he has been fully purified and forgiven. In contrast, regarding the poor person, our verse says, "[I]n order to bring him to atonement before Hashem." This implies that the pauper has come closer to achieving atonement but has not yet attained it. Why is there a difference between a rich person and a poor person?

Our sages teach that tzara'at is a consequence of haughtiness. While haughtiness is wrong, a rich person's haughtiness is at least understandable, as it is written (Devarim 8:13-14), "And you increase silver and

gold for yourselves, and everything that you have will increase. And your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, your G-d." In contrast, what would cause a poor person to act haughtily other than a bad character? Therefore, the Torah says, "in order to bring him to atonement." Because of his bad character, his atonement is not yet completed with the oil being placed on his head. (Meshech Chochmah)

The above explanation is illustrated by the following story: A chassid who visited his rebbe and said, "Rebbe, I brag too much, and because I know that humility is a good trait, I would like your help."

Before the rebbe could respond, his study door opened and in walked a sobbing chassid. He managed to regain his composure just long enough to say that a mad dog was killing all his chickens, and soon his entire livelihood would be lost. Turning to his first visitor, the rebbe ordered, "Go help this man."

"Who me?" the chassid said incredulously. "I'm scared of the dog." So the rebbe offered some advice to the second chassid, who then left.

Immediately another chassid entered and asked the rebbe's opinion regarding a match that had been proposed for his daughter. "What do you think?" the rebbe asked his original visitor.

"How can I give advice?" the chassid responded. "I'm not an educated man." So the rebbe made some remarks to his latest visitor, and he too left.

A fourth chassid entered and asked the rebbe for a loan so that he could buy a certain investment that had been offered to him. "Please lend this man 1,000 gold coins," the rebbe said to his first supplicant.

"But I myself have no money," the chassid answered. Hearing that, the rebbe opened his drawer, removed some bills from the box of the gemach (free loan fund), and turned them over to this fourth visitor.

At last the rebbe and the first chassid were alone. "Tell me," the rebbe asked his chassid. "You have no money, no education, and you are a coward. Exactly what is it that you brag about?"

That is, perhaps, the meaning of the gemara (Nedarim 38) which teaches: "G-d rests his spirit only on one who is brave, wise, wealthy and humble." What G-d really wants is the fourth trait, humility. However, in the absence of the other traits, humility is too easy.



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