

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**T**his shall be the teaching regarding one with tzora'as on the day of his becoming clean (from his condition), and [he] shall be brought to the kohain. And the kohain shall go out beyond the camp, and the kohain looks, and behold the affliction of tzora'as has healed from the one with tzora'as.” These verses (Vayikra 14:2-3) would seem to contradict each other. Does the Kohain “go out” to the one with tzora'as (as stated in 14:3), or is the one with tzora'as brought to the kohain (as indicated in 14:2)? Numerous resolutions to this contradiction have been suggested by the commentators.

Rav Saadya Gaon is among those who say that it is not the one with tzora'as that “goes to the kohain,” but someone else who contacts the kohain and tells him that the affliction seems to have healed. After all, the kohain is (likely) inside the camp, and until declared ritually clean by a kohain (and the corresponding rituals done, see 14:4-8), the one afflicted is not allowed to enter the camp. Word is sent to the kohain to come out and examine the “tzarua” (one with tzora'as), who then comes outside the camp in order to examine him. The expression in the verse does not mean “and he (the ‘tzarua’) is brought to the kohain,” but “and it (word of the affliction healing) is brought to the kohain.”

Two issues would have to be addressed with this approach. First of all, it should be obvious that someone has to inform the kohain; how else would he know to come out to check whether the tzora'as has healed? Why would the Torah need to tell us that word is brought to the kohain if this was, from a practical standpoint, necessary? It is possible, however, that a proactive kohain might make regular checkups on his “patient” to see how he's doing; the Torah would then be telling the kohain that he has to wait to hear from the “patient” (that he thinks he's healed) before going out to him. The second issue that needs to be addressed is the symmetry of the expression “and he/it is brought to the kohain,” which appears when the tzora'as first breaks out (13:2 and 13:9) and when it heals (14:2). When the problem first arises, it is the afflicted that goes to the kohain, not word that someone may have tzora'as. The kohain doesn't go to the one afflicted, the one afflicted goes to the kohain. We would expect that the same expression (“v'huva el ha'kohain”) should

mean the same thing in both verses; according to Rav Saadya Gaon's approach, though, the first time it would mean “and he shall be brought” (even against his will), while the second time it would mean “and it shall be brought.” It is possible, though, to translate both expressions as “and it shall be brought,” with the way “it” is brought to the kohain (when the tzora'as first appears) being going to the kohain to be examined. Nevertheless, the more straightforward translation of the word is “and he shall be brought.”

Because of the symmetry, Ibn Ezra says that just as the first “v'huva” indicates his being brought to the kohain even against his will (if need be), so too does the second one indicate being brought even against his will; even if a “tzarua” doesn't want to be examined by a kohain so that he can avoid bringing the offerings that are part of the process of becoming ritually pure, he is brought to the kohain anyway. The implication is that it's not a physical “bringing” (as he can't enter the camp to be brought to the kohain), but a statement that the “tzarua” has no choice in the matter; he must “go” to the kohain, i.e. follow his instructions. Similarly, Toras Kohanim says the “tzarua” does not have the option of remaining “tamay” (ritually impure), but he must “go” to the kohain to start the purification process. [This is how Ramban understands the Toras Kohanim; others understand it to mean that there is no need to wait before going back to the kohain; he can be examined right away, as soon as the affliction heals.] Before quoting Toras Kohanim, Ramban suggests that the expression “being brought to the kohain” teaches us that the affliction being healed isn't enough to change the “tumah” status, but, in order to become “tahor” (ritually pure), he must “go” to the kohain to be declared “tahor” and start the purification process. The symmetry is not regarding the “tzarua” physically going to the kohain both times (when he is declared “tamay” and when he is declared “tahor”), but in regards to the role of the kohain in changing the person's status from “tahor” to “tamay” and then from “tamay” to “tahor,” and in regards to the process not being a voluntary one. He “goes” to the kohain in both cases, even if the kohain is the one who actually travels to him when he heals.

The most common approach among the commentators (e.g. Sefornu, Chizkuni and Ralbag) to reconciling the “tzarua” being brought to the kohain and the kohain going out of the camp is that both are true; the “tzarua” leaves the secluded area where he was living while he had the affliction and “goes” to an area

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just outside the camp (see Netziv on 14:3; see also Panim Yafos), and the kohain goes outside of the camp to examine him there. Tosfos says that this must be the case, as no one will go near the "tzarua" while he is secluded, so he has to come out, on his own, to an area where the kohain can meet him (see Oznayim LaTorah).

The messages behind all of these approaches are certainly true; the kohain is necessary for the purification process, and one cannot try to avoid or bypass this process. There may be an additional message here as well. Although the kohain is necessary at both the beginning and end of the process, it would be natural to be unhappy with one end of it but ecstatic about the other. Who would look forward to being examined by a kohain to see if he has tzora'as? Who wouldn't be enthusiastic about the possibility of the ordeal coming to an end, and be eager for the kohain to see if it has healed? Both "exams" are obligatory, but the mindset may not be the same for each of them. Do we approach all mitzvos with the same excitement? By using the same term for both ends of the process, the Torah may be telling us that we should approach every opportunity to follow G-d's will the same way, even if some are more appealing than others. We should be as excited to do every mitzvah as we are doing those we enjoy, and recognize that we are obligated to keep every commandment, not just those we appreciate. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing; he shall be brought unto the priest" (Lev. 14:2). Do houses have souls? Do nations?

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 tzoraat). If the scab was diagnosed as tzoraat, the development of the disease required the constant inspection of the priest. Our portion of Metzora opens with 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 (nega tzoraat)" is not limited to humans: "G-d 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 (nega tzoraat) in a house of the land of your possession, then he that owns the house shall come and tell the priest....' (Lev. 14:33-35)

How are we to understand that the very same malady-nega tzoraat-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?

Secondly, when we examine the text we find an interesting distinction between these two species of tzoraat. "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 (nega tzoraat)..." (Lev. 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..." (Lev. 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...." (Lev. 14:36-37)

We must keep in mind that translating nega tzoraat as 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 tzoraat cannot possibly be an illness in the classic sense, for if that were true, why does 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 tzoraat 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: mezuzahs on the doorposts, candelabra, menorahs 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.

Now, 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 Bet 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 tzoraat awaits us. And our holy land of Israel is especially sensitive to any moral infraction © 2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

As we saw last week, the sages understood tsaraat, the theme of this week's parsha, not as an illness but as a miraculous public exposure of the sin of lashon hara, speaking badly about people. Judaism is a sustained meditation on the power of words to heal or harm, mend or destroy. Just as G-d created the world with words, so we create, and can destroy, relationships with words.

The rabbis said much about lashon hara, but virtually nothing about the corollary, lashon tov, "good speech." The phrase does not appear in either the Babylonian Talmud or the Talmud Yerushalmi. It figures only in two midrashic passages where it refers to praising G-d. But lashon hara does not mean speaking badly about G-d. It means speaking badly about human beings. If it is a sin to speak badly about people, is it a mitzvah to speak well about them? My argument will be that it is, and to show this, let us take a journey through the sources.

In Mishnah Avot, Ethics of the Fathers (2:10-11), we read the following: "Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya,

Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh.

"He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arakh: an ever-flowing spring."

However, the practice of Rabban Yochanan in praising his disciples seems to stand in contradiction to a Talmudic principle:

"Rav Dimi, brother of Rav Safra said: Let no one ever talk in praise of his neighbour, for praise will lead to criticism." (Arakhin 16a)

Rashi gives two explanations of this statement. Having delivered excessive praise [yoter midai], the speaker himself will come to qualify his remarks, admitting for the sake of balance that the person of whom he speaks also has faults. Alternatively, others will point out his faults. For Rashi, the crucial consideration is, is the praise judicious, accurate, true, or it is overstated? If the former, it is permitted; if the latter, it is forbidden. Evidently Rabban Yochanan was careful not to exaggerate.

Rambam, however, sees matters differently. He writes: "Whoever speaks well about his neighbour in the presence of his enemies is guilty of a secondary form of evil speech [avak lashon hara], since he will provoke them to speak badly about him" (Hilkhot Deot 7:4). According to the Rambam the issue is not whether the praise is moderate or excessive, but the context in which it is delivered. If it is done in the presence of friends of the person about whom you are speaking, it is permitted. It is forbidden only when you are among his enemies and detractors. Praise then becomes a provocation, with bad consequences.

Are these merely two opinions or is there something deeper at stake? There is a famous passage in the Talmud which discusses how one should sing the praises of a bride at her wedding: "Our Rabbis taught: How should you dance before the bride [i.e. what should one sing]? "The School of Shammai say: [Sing] 'The bride is as she is.'

"The School of Hillel say: [Sing] 'The bride is beautiful and graceful.' The School of Beth Shammai said to the School of Hillel, 'If she were lame or blind, would you sing that the bride is beautiful and graceful? Does the Torah not say, 'Keep far from falsehood?'"

"The School of Hillel answered the School of Shammai: 'According to your view, if someone has made a bad purchase in the market, should you praise it in his eyes or depreciate it? Surely, one should praise it in his eyes.'" (Ketubot 16b-17a)

The disciples of Hillel hold that at a wedding you should sing that the bride is beautiful, whether she is or not. Shammai's disciples disagree. Whatever the occasion, don't tell a lie. "Do you call that a lie?" the Hillelites respond. In the eyes of the groom at least, the

bride is beautiful, just as in the eyes of someone who has just made a purchase, he has made a good deal, even if in your opinion, he hasn't.

What's really at stake here is not just temperament-puritanical Shammaites versus good-natured Hillelites-but two views about the nature of language. The Shammaites think of language as a way of making statements, which are either true or false. The Hillelites understand that language is about more than making statements. We can use language to encourage, empathise, motivate and inspire. Or we can use it to discourage, disparage, criticise and depress. Language does more than convey information. It conveys emotion. It creates or disrupts a mood. The sensitive use of speech involves social and emotional intelligence. Language, in J. L. Austin's famous account, can be performative as well as informative.

The argument between Hillel and Shammai is similar to that between Rambam and Rashi. For Rashi, as for Shammai, the key question about praise is: is it true, or is it excessive? For Rambam as for Hillel, the question is: what is the context? Is it being said among enemies or friends? Will it create warmth and esteem or envy and resentment?

We can go one further, for the disagreement between Rashi and Rambam about praise may be related to a more fundamental disagreement about the nature of the command, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). Rashi interprets the command to mean: do not do to your neighbour what you would not wish him to do to you (Rashi to Sanhedrin 84a). Rambam, however, says that the command includes the duty "to speak in his praise" (Hilkhot Deot 6:3). Rashi evidently sees praise of one's neighbour as optional, while Rambam sees it as falling within the command of love.

We can now answer a question we should have asked at the outset about the Mishnah in Avot that speaks of Yochanan ben Zakkai's disciples. Avot is about ethics, not about history or biography. Why then does it tell us that Rabban Yochanan had disciples? That, surely, is a fact not a value, a piece of information not a guide to how to live.

However, we can now see that the Mishnah is telling us something profound indeed. The very first statement in Avot includes the principle: "Raise up many disciples." But how do you create disciples? How do you inspire people to become what they could become, to reach the full measure of their potential? Answer: By acting as did Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai when he praised his students, showing them their specific strengths.

He did not flatter them. He guided them to see their distinctive talents. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the "plastered well that never loses a drop" was not creative but he had a remarkable memory-not unimportant in the days before the Oral Torah was written in books. Elazar ben Arakh, the "ever-flowing spring," was creative, but

needed to be fed by mountain waters (years later he separated from his colleagues and forgot all he had learned).

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai took a Hillel-Rambam view of praise. He used it not so much to describe as to motivate. And that is lashon tov. Evil speech diminishes us, good speech helps us grow. Evil speech puts people down, good speech lifts them up. Focused, targeted praise, informed by considered judgment of individual strengths, and sustained by faith in people and their potentiality, is what makes teachers great and their disciples greater than they would otherwise have been. That is what we learn from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

So there is such a thing as lashon tov. According to Rambam it falls within the command of "Love your neighbour as yourself." According to Avot it is one way of "raising up many disciples." It is as creative as lashon hara is destructive. Seeing the good in people and telling them so is a way of helping it become real, becoming a midwife to their personal growth. If so, then not only must we praise G-d. We must praise people too. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why is there a time of physical separation between husband and wife every month-a mandate found in this week's Torah portion. (Leviticus 15) To be sure a mandate ought to be observed no matter-but is there a rationale?

Perhaps the separation points to a difference between Jewish and fundamentalist Christian approaches to sexuality. In Christianity the basic purpose of sexual relations is procreation. In Judaism, as important as pru u'rvu (procreation) may be, onah, that is sexual pleasure as an expression of deep love is even more important.

Note the words of Ramban: "Speak words which arouse her to passion, union, love, desire and eros." (Epistle of Holiness) Of course, such words and actions should be reciprocated by wife to husband.

It may be suggested that a time frame of separation is mandated to heighten the physical encounter. A kind of pause that refreshes.

A second approach comes to mind. Martin Buber speaks of an I?it encounter, where the I relates to the other as a thing, an object to be manipulated and used to satisfy the I. This in contrast to the I?Thou encounter where the other is a persona, a subject to be considered and loved.

Hundreds of years before Buber, Rambam in his commentary to the Mishnah (Avot 1:16) wrote about love between husband and wife as empathetic friendship, a camaraderie involving a caring responsiveness, a sharing of innermost feelings...a

relationship of emotional rapport rooted in faith and confidence. (See Reflections of the Rav by Rabbi Abraham Besdin. Vol. II. P.63)

Here again, a time frame of separation may be mandated to make sure that spouses can relate in ways other than physical, and then transfer those feelings to the sexual act itself. The separation is intended to teach that I?Thou is intrinsic to the sexual encounter.

One last approach. In many ways love is not only holding on but letting go. To be sure, love involves embracing the other, but in the same breath it allows the other to realize his or her potential. This is the great challenge of harmonization. How can I be one with you while letting you be who you are? On the other hand, how can you be who you are without our becoming distant and alienated from each other?

This could be the meaning of ezer k'negdo (Genesis 2:18) which Rav Soloveitchik understands as Adam's "discovery of a companion who even though as unique and singular as he, will master the art of communicating and with him form a community." (Lonely Man of Faith p.26) In Milton Steinberg's words, "to hold with open arms."

Therefore a time frame of separation is mandated to foster individuality even as the coming together fosters commonalty. Each is stressed in the hope that they spill over and become part of the other and forge a balance.

These rationales do not explain why the separation takes place at the time of niddus (menstruation) or why immersion in a mikveh is crucial for purification-topics that I hope one day to discuss-but they may offer some understanding of why the Torah sees the separation as a conduit to enhancing love between husband and wife. © 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

Parshat 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. © 2011 D. Lifshitz and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Rashi quotes a tradition appearing in Midrash in this week's parsha to the effect that the discovery of a plague that infected the house of a Jew that settled in the Land of Israel in biblical times was in reality a blessing in disguise.

The Canaanites, anticipating the arrival of the Jews into the Land of Israel, stored their valuables in hollowed out sanctuaries within the walls of their houses. When a Jew settled in that house after the Canaanites had been defeated and had abandoned their homes, this mysterious plague descended upon the house. The appearance of this plague forced the house to be dismembered in order to be purified from the plague. When this occurred, the hidden Canaanite treasure was revealed and acquired by the Jewish owner of the house.

This somewhat strange Midrashic tradition contradicts the opinion expressed in the Talmud that house plagues never really occurred in real life and that the Torah included this subject only so that we would reap reward for studying and analyzing this purely theoretical subject matter..

There is another opinion in the Talmud that this house plague did actually occur but there is no mention in the Talmud of the blessing of hidden treasure being discovered. However it is obvious that Rashi chose this Midrashic tradition to highlight this particular subject of the parsha of this week. In so doing he undoubtedly signaled to us - his students - that there is an important lesson to be learned from this tradition.

It is not only that this tradition comes to teach us the old - and often true - platitude that in every cloud there is somehow a silver lining. It teaches us something far deeper, namely that the ways of the Lord, and the vagaries of life, are inscrutable, unpredictable and not always given to rational explanation and analysis.

The Lord wants us to somehow inherit Canaanite treasure. But it is not given to us directly, clearly or simply. Rather, it somehow comes through initial pain and disappointment - the apparent destruction of our house and the shame of being found residing in a dwelling of spiritual impurity. Only then, when one has passed through these difficulties - has had consultations with the kohein, has been quarantined and has taken apart his house - does the apparent purpose and gift of God become apparent.

We would all certainly prefer being granted hidden treasure and other good fortune directly and

clearly. But that is not the reality of life. Many times we suffer disappointments and trials and only later are we able to realize how much true good fortune came to us through those seemingly unpleasant events.

That is why the rabbis admonished us to make a blessing on seemingly bad events in the same manner that we make a blessing when we feel that good things have happened to us. In life we are always bidden to accept what the Lord has granted to us, for many times the "bad" event may turn out not to be so bad after all. © 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 MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Eternal Sabbath

I was always troubled by the very famous verse in this week's portion. "Wherefore the Children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, (Shabbos) to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant" (Exodus 31:16).

The Torah has to speak to each of its adherents as if they are the sole adherents to the faith. How can Israel be commanded to "observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant." Obviously, each generation must keep the Shabbos and thus it shall be observed through generations. But the words "La'asos as hashabos l'dortsom bris olam, which literally means to make the Shabbos for generations as a perpetual covenant, is a difficult concept to grasp.

Recently, my friend and colleague, Rabbi Baruch Lederman retold an anecdote in his wonderful weekly bulletin, ShulWeek. After a bit of research, I was unable to verify all the facts of his version of the story, but what I will relate is as poignant. (Some of this I quote verbatim.)

Back in the mid nineties a Jewish philanthropist together with an advertising executive collaborated in having the prestigious New York Times place a small box on its front page of the Friday edition. In the box was the weekly Shabbos candle lighting time. The idea lasted a number of years but at two thousand dollars a week, in June 1999, the little notice stopped appearing in the Friday Times.

But it did appear one more time. On January 1, 2000, the NY Times ran a Millennium edition. It was a special issue that featured three front pages. One had the news from January 1, 1900. The second was the actual news of the day, January 1, 2000. And then they had a third front page a futuristic January 1, 2100.

This fictional page included things like a welcome to the fifty-first state: Cuba, and whether robots should be allowed to vote. And so on. And in addition to the fascinating articles, there was one more thing. Down on the bottom of the Year 2100 front page,

was the candle lighting time in New York for January 1, 2100. Nobody paid for it. It was just put in by the Times.

I was unable to verify a quote by the production manager of the New York Times or whether he was Irish Catholic or whether he really did explain the small box by saying, "We don't know what will happen in the year 2100. It is impossible to predict the future. But of one thing you can be certain. That in the year 2100 Jewish women will be lighting Shabbos candles." That part of the story may be apocryphal. However, a letter by Elie Rosenfeld, which did appear in the Times certainly attests to that very theme.

"To the Editor: I enjoyed the "very early edition" of the front page from Friday, Jan. 1, 2100 (The Millennium section, Jan. 1), especially the little "advertisement" that ran on the bottom left-hand corner of the page. It is telling that you ran the Sabbath candle-lighting time for that Friday. Although it is normally a paid advertisement, the editors seemed to feel that the ad had its rightful place on that page, knowing that it may be the only current advertising client that will be around in the next century.

"ELIE ROSENFELD, Teaneck, N.J., Jan. 2, 2000."

Perhaps the Torah is not commanding, but predicting. Wherefore the Children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, (Shabbos) to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant" (Exodus 31:16). The Children of Israel are exhorted to keep the Shabbos in a manner in which it shall indeed last forever. Perhaps the thousands upon thousands who continue to glow in the light of Shabbos are indeed glowing in the light of the Shabbos of their forebears. And our observance will in turn ensure the observance of Shabbos for future generations as well. © 2011 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

The pasuk says, "When you come to Land of Canaan which I give to you for a possession, and I will put a plague of Tzaraas in a house of the land of your possession" [Vayikra 14:34]. Rash"i quotes the Medrash Rabbah, which says that this was in fact good news for the Jewish people.

Tzaraas (or Nega(im)) is a spiritual plague causing various types of discoloration of skin, clothing, or house walls; and associated with various sins of speech. Why would the appearance of Tzaraas on their houses be good news? If Tzaraas is found on the walls of the house, one is required to demolish the house! How many of us would consider that good news?

The answer is, as Rash"i says, that the inhabitants of the Land of Canaan hid great wealth and treasures in the walls of their houses. If a person would get a plague of Tzaraas on his house and follow the

halacha of tearing it down, he would find a fortune inside. Therefore, this was good news.

Many of us have, no doubt, been bothered by the following question: If G-d wants me to receive a present, this is a very strange way for Him to go about giving it. We all know that Tzaraas comes as punishment for a sin. The Talmud [Eruchin 16a] lists a number of sins for which Negaim come. They come for slander, they come for being stingy, etc. So which way is it? Is Tzaraas coming for a sin or is it coming as a way to provide a treasure?

Would it not be more logical and sensible that there should be a halacha that when one puts up his Mezuzah in Eretz Yisroel, it is necessary to bore into the door post, so he could find his treasure that way? It is certainly a very strange teaching of our Sages that I should find my treasure specifically when I am in the midst of suffering a punishment which I deserve.

Additionally, the language of the section of 'Nigei Batim' [Plagues on houses] is different from the language used by the Torah in connection with other types of Tzaraas. There are three types of Tzaraas. One type appears on the house, one type appears on clothes, and one type appears on the human body.

Concerning the negah of the house, the Torah says "And I will put a negah on the house of the land of your inheritance" [14:34]. By the other types of Tzaraas, it says, "And the garment will be brought..." or "And the person will be brought..." The Torah speaks in third person-the Jew will find that he has a Tzaraas. Only by the house does G-d speak in first person-"I will put..."

The Ramba"m says [Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas 16:10] that the three categories of Tzaraas (house, clothing, person) have an order to them. The purpose of Tzaraas was to remove a person from the sin of Lashon HaRa [evil tongue; slander]. If a person would speak Lashon HaRa, first he would get Tzaraas in his house. If he would persist in speaking Lashon HaRa, it would begin to affect his clothing. If he persisted in his evil ways, it would affect his body.

Rav Bergman, in his Share Orah, mentions a principle that we have mentioned a number of times in this shiur: At the end of the Tochacha in Bechukosai, the Torah concludes with words of consolation [Vayikra 26:42]. "And I will remember my covenant with Yaakov, and even my covenant with Yitzchak, and even my covenant with Avraham, and the Land I will remember." However, the Tochaha [chastisement] in Parshas Ki Savo does not end with any words of consolation.

The Zohar says that they asked in the Beis Medrash regarding the reason for this discrepancy. Rav Shimon Bar Yochai answered that in the Tochacha of Parshas Bechukosai, the thrust and theme of the chastisement was "Your dealings with Me is with 'keri,' so too, my dealings with you will be with a fury of 'keri.'" In other words, if you think things are just 'happening' (mikreh); if you don't take Me seriously; if you don't believe in Divine Providence, then the response will be

that I too will deal with you such that you will be subject to all the evils that "nature" can offer. I will stand, so to speak, on the sidelines.

On the other hand, the Tochacha of Parshas Ki Savo constantly says, "I will do this to you; I will do that to you; etc." When it is G-d Himself that is handing out the punishment, the relationship between the Jewish People and their Creator has not been severed. G-d is punishing, but there still is a relationship. It is analogous to the case where the father knows the child is doing bad and spansks him. He punishes him, but the relationship is still there.

Sometimes, however, there is a situation where the father walks out of the room and says, "I am going to teach this child a lesson. Let whatever happens to him, happen. Let him play with matches and get burnt. I will show him, by leaving." This is the Tochacha of Parshas Bechukosai. This is a far worse curse; therefore it needs a consolation.

This is the difference between nigei batim and all other Negaim. With nigei batim, where one has just strayed and spoken Lashon HaRa, perhaps occasionally, G-d says "Our relationship is still there"-I will personally punish. "I will place the nega..." But if one persists and goes further and further away; then eventually, it will no longer be "I will place..." It will be that the plague will come, but the relationship will no longer be there.

Now we can begin to understand how there can be a treasure in a punishment. Chaza"l tell us that when Shimshon [Samson] was in the house of the Plishtim [Philistines] and his two eyes were taken out, Samson prayed to G-d: "With the merit of the loss of one of my eyes, let me bring down the house upon the Plishtim; and with the merit of the loss of my other eye, let me have the merit to enter Olam Haba."

This is amazing. The Talmud tells us [Sotah 9b] that "Shimshon went after his eyes..." He sinned with his eyes and as a result of that, he lost his eyes. How then, does he come and claim to have merit based on the loss of his eyes? Rav Bergman says, herein lies a great principle. If G-d gives a person a punishment and he responds to that punishment, then he turns the punishment into a merit. That is what suffering and punishment is all about. The purpose is to strengthen the relationship between G-d and man. If Shimshon responded and knew that he did Teshuva [repentance] for the sin that he did with his eyes, he could then come back to G-d and say "with the fact that I lost my eyes and I realized the lesson in that and am thereby turning it into a merit for myself, with that merit, grant me the ability to kill the Plishtim and get into Olam Haba."

With this we can now understand how the Nega Tzaraas can be hiding a treasure. We had asked, if it comes from a sin, how can it be the source of a treasure? The answer is that with the nega of Nigei Batim, which is the first level of Lashon HaRa that a person commits, there is still a personal involvement of

G-d. ("And I will place...") If a person then responds, and as the Rambam says, rectifies his ways, he can in fact turn that punishment into a merit. Therefore, it is appropriate for this correct response to merit the treasures that the inhabitants of Canaan left behind.
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SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Sponsored by Mr. Moshe Cohen on the yahrzeit of his father R' Chaim ben R' Zvi hakohen A"H

In this week's parashah (and last week's), we read that a metzora must leave the camp or city for seven (or more) days and sit alone. Chazal say that this is a punishment for the antisocial behavior of speaking lashon hara.

Rav Yaakov Emden zt"l points out the many benefits which man can attain only when he is part of society. Indeed, Chazal say, "Give me a friend or give me death," and the Torah says, "It is not good for man to be alone."

All alone, man could not obtain all of his physical needs, including proper food, drink, clothing, and shelter. A person also could not fulfill the Torah if he were alone. For example, he could not carry out the laws of property, the laws of marriage, and the laws of child-rearing.

A person who is all alone can never pray with a minyan or have his Torah questions resolved by scholars, and thus he can not properly practice a single one of the six pillars (listed in Pirkei Avot) on which the world stands: justice, truth, peace, Torah, prayer, and acts of kindness. Also, how can man emulate Hashem if he is all alone? For example, just as Hashem is merciful, man must be merciful to his fellow men.

Of course, there are times for being alone, but even in those times, man should not roam too far from home. Man is even capable of achieving the concentration that comes from solitude while he is surrounded by people. (Migdal Oz: Perek Aliyat Habadidut)

The mishnah (Nega'im 2:5) states: "A person sees all nega'im—tzara'at wounds—except his own." Literally, this means that a person, even a kohen, may not be the judge of whether he himself has tzara'at. Rather, he must go to another kohen.

Figuratively, however, this statement is frequently interpreted as referring to the fact that people are rarely objective about their own faults. A person sees everyone else's faults, but not his own.

If so, asks Rav Eliezer David Gruenwald zatz"l, how can a person assess where he stands? The answer is found in another mishnah: "One does not search [for chametz] by the light of the sun and by the light of the moon, but only by the light of a candle." The strong "light of the sun" represents wealth, and the

weak "light of the moon" represents lack of success. Neither of these is an accurate indicator of whether Hashem is happy with a person. Only the "light of a candle," an allusion to the verse, "A mitzvah is a candle" is an accurate indicator.

What does this mean? If a person wants to know where he stands in his service of Hashem, he should look at his attitude towards mitzvot. If a person considers mitzvot to be a burden, then he has a long way to go. However, if he enjoys performing mitzvot, then he is on the right track. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Chasdei David, p. 11b)

We have a number of holidays that commemorate victories over our enemies. How do they differ from each other? The Jewish people has two kinds of enemies. There are those who oppose the existence of the Jewish nation, and there are those who oppose that nation's service of Hashem.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner zt"l teaches that Pesach represents the defeat of the first kind of enemy, while Purim represents the defeat of the other. In each case, the enemy that was defeated was the purveyor par excellence of the type of enmity which it represented.

Chazal refer to the "Seven Nations" and the "Four Kingdoms" which have opposed the Jews. The reference to one set of enemies as "Nations" and the other as "Kingdoms" is significant.

To be a servant, Rav Hutner explains, one must meet a two-part definition: (1) he must be acquired by a master, and (2) he must be informed what the master's will is and be given the means to carry out that will. The Four Kingdoms opposed Bnei Yisrael on the first level; the Seven Nations opposed them on the second.

The Four Kingdoms that have oppressed the Jewish people attempt to subjugate and enslave them so that they will be servants of these Kingdoms, and not Hashem's servants. This is an action taken by kingdoms, in opposition to Hashem's kingdom. The first nation that did this was Egypt.

The Seven Nations, on the other hand, did not oppose the "nationhood" of the Jewish people. Rather, they attempted to prevent Bnei Yisrael from conquering Eretz Yisrael. In so doing, they sought to withhold from the Jewish people the means to carry out the will of its Master. Since no subjugation of the Jewish people is involved, no kings are necessary. Even the common man, i.e., the nation, can be the enemy. The first nation that did this was Amalek, the ancestor of Haman.

At the time of the Exodus, the Jews were acquired by Hashem as His servants, and they ceased to be the servants of Pharaoh (see Megillah 14a). This is Pesach. Then, before Bnei Yisrael could receive the Torah and be informed of what the master's will is, Amalek (the ancestor of Haman) attacked them. When he was defeated, the Torah could be given. (Similarly, after Haman was defeated, the Jewish people accepted the Torah anew (Shabbat 88a).) (Pachad Yitzchak)