

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

On 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.¹

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*,² and Jennifer Jacquet's *Is Shame Necessary?*,² 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 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

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

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

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



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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.³ 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

³ 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.

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 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. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd He shall restore the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers." (Mal. 3:24) This coming Sabbath—at least as far as the rabbinical homily (drashah) before the festival of Passover is concerned—is known as Shabbat Hagadol, the Great Sabbath. In a usual calendar year, when there are at least several days between the Sabbath and Passover, we read on Shabbat Hagadol the prophetic portion from Malachi, who speaks of the "great and awesome day" which will precede the redemption. It is actually Elijah the prophet who will herald this day, and Elijah's major task will be "to restore the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents.

Apparently our prophet understood that the major issue facing each and every one of us is discord within the family, and if the period of redemption will be one of harmony and love such rapprochement must begin with parent-child relationship. However, there is one strange note within this verse: The fifth commandment ordains that children honor their parents, yet Malachi begins his familial charge to the parents who must first turn their hearts to the children. What does this mean?

Many years ago, I suggested that imbedded in the prophetic verse was the prophet's vision of our very unique generation, when the ba'al teshuvah (penitent) movement will be so successful that many parents will be learning from their children around the seder table.

Although it is undoubtedly true, as Maimonides teaches us, that there will be no redemption without penitential return (teshuva), life experiences have taught me that there is still another interpretation to Malachi's words.

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

How can we avoid the pitfall? First of all, it is crucial to be loving and accepting of all of our children, even of those who may have strayed far from the path. That is why there are four children type-casted around the seder table, one of them being the wicked child. He too must be given a place which enables him to feel the familial embrace. Even more noteworthy is how the Haggadah defines the wicked child: he is neither a Sabbath desecrator nor a partaker of non-kosher food but is rather one who excludes himself from the community of Israel. For Judaism, it is critical that the Jew feels him/herself to be a member of the entire Jewish family. It is incumbent upon every Jewish parent to inclusively accept all the children. The wicked child may even ask provocative and insolent questions to the parents, and is then told by the author of the Haggadah: "hakheh his teeth" a difficult verb usually

translated as “blunt his teeth” or give him a slap across the mouth. Nothing could be further from the true interpretation. The Hebrew verb hakheh means to remove the sharpness of an iron implement by the warmth of fire (Eccl. 10:10). The wise parent will take away the sting from the words of a wicked child through familial love and warmth.

Finally, I would suggest that parents must never stereotype their children. Indeed, each of the stereotypes in the Haggadah can be looked at in an opposite way. The wise child may turn out to be a know-it-all, who is supercilious and arrogant. Indeed, the famed Seer of Lublin would always say, “I prefer the wicked person who knows he is wicked to the righteous who thinks he is righteous.” At least the wicked person is honest and he has a real chance of repenting. The one who is called foolish may in reality be naïve and wholehearted and the child does “not know how to ask” may be operating in a realm far beyond logic and much closer to the Divine. At any rate, each of us has a little bit of each of the four children within our own personality; hardly anyone is consistent—either in being good or being wicked—all the time. The message of the Haggadah: be loving and not judgmental, wise and not punitive. ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha is truly one of the most difficult subjects for people in our time to contemplate, understand or from which to gain knowledge and inspiration. The entire subject of these mysterious diseases, which manifested themselves on the human body, in clothing and even in houses and buildings is technically discussed in Mishna and also in various places in the Talmud itself. However, the fact that the subject is discussed does not really reveal the underlying pathology of these diseases nor does it help explain it to us in a purely rational fashion.

We are all aware that the Talmud connects the disease to the sin of slandering others and improper speech. Nevertheless, the mystery of the cause, diagnosis and cure for the condition remains a troubling and hidden matter. It is beyond my ability to add any new insights into this age old discussion by the great scholars of Israel. I think, though, that we simply have to accept that there are physical diseases that manifest themselves because of spiritual failings, whatever those failings may be and however they are interpreted.

We are all aware that there are psychosomatic diseases that can and often do become actually physical. Medical science has not yet been able to determine why such phenomena occur. Well, just as there are, so to speak, mentally caused diseases, the Torah informs us that there are also spiritually caused diseases that actually effect one's body, clothing and

even one's home. There are many events and occurrences in life, both personal and national, that defy logic or any form of human understanding.

The Torah does indicate to us the areas of our lives where our human vulnerabilities exist and are apparent. Certainly our bodies, our health, our appearance and our general physical well-being rank as some of the most vulnerable of all human conditions. Our bodies are so delicately formed and perfectly balanced that even the slightest malfunction of any of its parts immediately causes pain and requires our attention.

The Torah expands this idea to include spiritual imbalances and shortcomings. We are usually never conscious of these matters and if, in fact, they are pointed out to us by others, the usual reaction is one of resentment. So, through the mechanism of physical symptoms as described in this week's parsha, the Torah reminds us that we need to examine and purify ourselves spiritually and not merely physically.

Our bodies, our clothing, even our dwelling places require inspection and sanctification. Even though the physical manifestations of these shortcomings are no longer apparent in our time, the underlying lesson is still present in all of our actions and attitudes.

The realization that we can be woefully deficient in behavior, unless we are constantly monitoring our relationship to our unique value system, is essential for living a truly Jewish and observant life. We are responsible for discerning those weaknesses within us even if they are not physically apparent. Perhaps this is the message to us from this week's parsha. ©2016 *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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

One of the most difficult paragraphs in the Haggadah is the one recited as we open the door for Eliyahu (Elijah) the Prophet. There we proclaim, “pour out your wrath upon the nations that do not know You—shefokh hamatkha el ha-goym asher lo ye-da-u-kha.” Why must the Haggadah be so harsh?

It has been noted that these words were introduced during the Crusades when some Christians blamed Jews for killing their children. These accusers maintained that the Jews used the blood of their children to bake matzot or to prepare red wine. As the seder ended, Jews opened their doors fearful that such a child would be found at the door. It was then, in great anger that the Jews made the declaration of shefokh.

Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld notes that the first words of shefokh echo the Exodus narrative. Shefokh

hamatkha sounds like the word le-hashhit, the term used to describe G-d's killing of the Egyptian first born. (Exodus 12:13) Lo ye-da-u-kha, "who do not know you." mirrors the words of the Bible, descriptive of the evil regime in Egypt who did not know (lo yadah) Yosef (Joseph). (Exodus 1:8). Those accusing the Jews falsely are likened to Pharaohs who deserve to be harshly punished.

Appropriately, Eliyahu is associated with these words as he is the zealous prophet. Upset that the people of Israel were turning away from G-d, Eliyahu flees to the desert. "Why are you alone?" asks G-d. Eliyahu replies, "I am zealous oh Lord on your behalf." (Kings 1:19:9-10)

Thus, as we open the door for Eliyahu, we recall his zealotry and our responsibility to similarly stand strong to defend ourselves. We of course must remember that these words only apply to those who are viciously attaching us.

One more thought. Perhaps the Haggadah emphasizes that we deal strongly with our external enemies to remind us that we must conduct ourselves differently when dealing with our own people. When dealing with the enemies of Israel, the rules are harsh—sometimes, especially when we are attacked, we must declare, "pour out your wrath." This is in contrast to internal disputes. There, we are in effect disagreeing with members of our own family. The rules, therefore, must be far more benevolent, based firmly on principles of love, acceptance and loyalty.

Note that after declaring that he was zealous, Eliyahu hears a sudden loud noise. He witnesses a wild storm and later finally sees a fire spring up out of nowhere. After these events, the voice of G-d informs Eliyahu that He can neither be seen nor heard in any of these dramatic natural wonders. G-d is rather found in a quiet, still voice, a kol demama. As G-d tells the prophet, "it is in this still voice that I can be found." (Kings 1:19:11, 12)

Even after this episode, Eliyahu doesn't understand G-d's message of teaching with love. When asked again why he was in the desert, Eliyahu again proclaims, "I am zealous for you oh G-d. Your people have rejected you.... and I am the only one who remains a believer." (Kings 1:19:14) Eliyahu failed to understand the power of the soft and modest voice when dealing with his people. He is no longer deemed suitable to lead Am Yisrael. The Lord therefore instructs him to appoint Elisha the prophet as his successor. (Kings 1:19:15-16).

Perhaps when we open the door, we ought also read this section of the Prophets where Eliyahu is taught to embrace his people with love. Eliyahu at the seder is a fixing (tikkun) of his past. We note that one day, the same Eliyahu who acted zealously towards his people, will be the one to announce the coming of the Messiah when all of us will return to G-d and to one

another through the kol demama -- the tender, soft love. ©2016 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.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

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 that 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. ©2016 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I will place tzora'as affliction upon a house in the land of your possession. The one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the Cohen, 'Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house'" (Lev. 14:34-35).

The Talmud teaches that the affliction in the house may be a punishment for begrudging things to others (Arachin 16b). The Hebrew word for tzora'as can be broken down to read tsar ayin, an oppressive eye, referring to refusal to share one's things with others. "A person may have asked a neighbor to lend him an item, but the neighbor claimed that he had no such item. The affliction in the house requires the owner to remove everything from the house, at which time his claim that he did not possess the requested item will be publicly proven to have been untrue" (Vayikra Rabba 17:3).

It is also possible to be a tsar ayin even if one does lend his belongings or gives tzedakah. One can do so with a demeaning attitude that causes the recipient to feel humiliated. It is not uncommon for people to look upon recipients of tzedakah as schnorrers (beggars), and even if one does give

tzedakah, one may do so with a condescending attitude.

People who are in need of help are often broken in spirit because of their dependence on others. It is a great mitzvah to be encouraging and uplift them. We should remember that when we give tzedakah, we receive much more than we give (Vayikra Rabbah 34:10). If our attitude toward tzedakah is begrudging, the pain we inflict upon the recipient may outweigh the good we do for them.

The Torah says, "When you lend money to My people, to the poor with you" (Exodus 22:24). The commentaries remark that everything in the world belongs to G-d. In His infinite wisdom, He has given more to some, less to others. The wealthy should know that their wealth has been given to them merely for safe-keeping, and that they must give of it to the poor.

"To the poor with you" means that the money of the poor is with the wealthy, who should know that they must give of it to the poor, because it is their rightful possession. This is why the Torah emphasizes 'the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession.' Remember that it is My land, and that it is given to you with the understanding that you will share your portion with the needy. Rabbi Yishmael cites the verse, 'the one to whom the house belongs' will suffer the affliction in the house; i.e., one who thinks that the house is exclusively his, rather than a gift from G-d which he should share with the less fortunate" (Arachin 16b).

If one is aware that the tzedakah that he gives is merely that which rightfully belongs to the poor, one will not give grudgingly. *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. ©2016 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais HaMussar

Parshas Metzora deals with various types of tumah. The Kuzari (2:60) explains that all forms of tumah are in reality offshoots of the primary tumah -- the tumah of a corpse (See also Ramban in this week's parsha 15:11 who mentions this idea). Chazal tell us that the metzora is likened to a dead person. The tumos of niddah, zivah and shichvas zera are all created by bodily discharges which could have contributed to the creation of a living being. A lack of creating life, in effect, constitutes a form of death.

Rav Wolbe explains (Daas Shlomo) that death is a phenomenon that was not built into the fabric of creation. Only after the advent of cheit in general, and the sin of eating from the eitz hadaas in particular, did death become the way of the world. Thus, cheit and tumah are closely related since cheit caused death and death is the root of all tumah. For this reason, the Torah imposed laws that necessitate various levels of distance that must be maintained from those who are tamei, since the Torah wishes that we distance

ourselves from sin and all its consequences.

Chazal tell us, "Sin covers over the heart of a person" (Yoma 39a). Every sin causes the heart to be covered with a thin film of impurity that dulls its innate sensitivities. This dulling of the senses is similar to death since, to a certain degree, the clarity of the heart's perception ceases to exist.

Kedusha stands diametrically opposite tumah: it signifies life and it allows one to experience life in its truest form. Moreover, it instills one's heart with sensitivities that are unknown to those who lack his level of kedusha. Such a person can sense a cheit that might have gone unnoticed by someone who does not possess such a high level of kedusha.

Every sin obstructs the spiritual arteries of the heart thereby dulling its ability to discern right from wrong. Not being offended by seeing an indecent sight is not something to be proud of. One of our great leaders compared it to a peasant who walks barefoot on pebbles without it affecting him: Both have simply become desensitized to the point where things that should set off bells simply go unnoticed.

Indeed, there are many things that while they do not affect gentiles, they definitely have a negative effect on Jews. We are aristocrats and we can sense even the smallest deviation from kedusha. Appreciate your innate greatness and guard this virtue as you would the apple of your eye! ©2016 Harav S. Wolbe zt"l and AishDas Society

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'dortosom 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. ©2011 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Immersion (in the Mikvah)

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

Anyone or anything that has been defiled, whether man or utensils (except for earthenware and foodstuff), may be immersed in the water that is gathered in the ground i.e. a *Mikva*, and then they become *Tahor* (spiritually clean).

One who is required to immerse in a *Mikvah* must recite the blessing "*Al Hatvillah*" (who has commanded us regarding immersion). The reason that we use the language "*Al Hatvillah*" and not "*Litbol*" (to immerse-which would indicate that immersion is an obligation) is because immersion in it of itself is not an obligation for one can remain in a state of defilement, "*Tumah*". As well if one did not recite the blessing one

still emerges spiritually clean (*Tahor*) after the immersion in the *Mikvah*.

There are those who say that though all blessings are recited before the Mitzvah is performed (*Over lasiyatan*) with regard to *Mikvah* this is done after the actual immersion. Thus even though a woman who is a *Niddah* or anyone who has other defilements, may say a *Bracha* while they are *Tammei* (defiled), it is best that they first immerse and then say the blessing for it is better to recite the blessing when one is in a pure state. Others insist however, that the blessing must be recited before the Mitzvah. To satisfy the requirement of both these views, one can first immerse one time (thus the person would be pure), and then recite the blessing and immerse a second time (which will satisfy the view of reciting the blessing before the action). ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"This shall be [the corpus of] law regarding one who has *tzora'as*" (Vayikra 14:2). The word "[the corpus of] law regarding" ("Toras"), appears 16 times in the Torah (and once more when it means "the corpus of law from"), and numerous additional times throughout Nach, but this is the only time where it is preceded by the word "shall be" ("tihiyeh"). Why does the Torah place this "corpus of law" in the future, especially when none of the others are?

Of the 17 times the word "Toras" is used in the Torah, four of them are said regarding the laws of "tzora'as" (13:59, 14:2, 14:32 and 14:57), plus one "Torah" (14:54) as well. Why are we told that "this is the corpus of law regarding tzora'as" so many times? Granted, the first is said regarding the laws of afflicted clothing, the second (our verse) introducing the process of an afflicted person becoming ritually cleansed, and the third specifically about the offerings brought by a poor person, so they can be said to be different "corpuses of law," but why consider them separate rather than combining them into one "corpus"? Besides, the fourth (and fifth) refer to everything, including the other three "corpuses," so why separate them before putting them all back together? [Malbim tells us what the (inclusive) word "Torah" generally comes to teach us, and what the (limiting) word "this" generally teaches us, but he doesn't specify what each of the five are specifically teaching us. He also addresses why the word "tihiyeh" is used.] Also, why are there two "summations" (first "Torah" and then "Toras") at the very end, rather than just one?

Finally, the order of the sections (or "corpuses") seems a bit disjointed. First the laws regarding the "tzora'as" that afflicts the body is discussed (13:1-46), then that of the "tzora'as" that afflicts a garment (13:47-59), then back to the person whose body was afflicted,

and how he becomes ritually cleansed (14:1-32), followed by the “tzora’as” that afflicts a house (14:33-53), including the “ritual cleansing” that parallels those of a person, and then the summation (14:54-57), which covers everything. Wouldn’t it make more sense to teach everything regarding the “tzora’as” that afflicts the body, including the “ritual cleansing,” before moving on to the other types? Why does the affliction of a garment “interrupt” the two aspects of a bodily affliction? And if the process of ritual cleansing is going to be separated from the type of affliction one is being cleansed from, shouldn’t the third type of “tzora’as,” that of a structure, be inserted first too, rather than putting it all by itself at the end? What should we make of the way the laws of “tzora’as” are taught and how they are presented?

Last week (<http://tinyurl.com/hffaj3e>) I suggested that the laws of “tzora’as,” which are part of a larger group of “impurity laws” that also includes the ritual impurity caused by animal carcasses (11:1-47), by childbirth (12:1-8) and via bodily emissions (15:1-33), were taught to Aharon and his sons during their seven-day training period (see 8:33-35, see also Sh’mos 29:35-37), which led up to the “Eighth Day” (Vayikra 9:1), the Mishkan’s first day of operation. Aharon and his sons were not allowed to leave the Mishkan complex the entire week (8:33), during which time they were taught the laws and details of the offerings to be brought in the Mishkan, and were trained in how to bring them (etc.). It makes sense for the laws of ritual impurity to be taught then as well, since they are quite complex (especially those of “tzora’as”), and they all needed to be known before the “Eighth Day” in order to prevent the Mishkan from becoming ritually impure. Well, almost all of them.

The “tzora’as” that afflicts houses wouldn’t become relevant until the nation reached the Promised Land (14:34), so although an integral part of the corpus of “tzora’as” law, it didn’t need to be taught until they were almost there. And, because “ritual cleansing” from “tzora’as” would not become relevant until the “tzora’as” healed (even the type that doesn’t need a week or two before it can be identified), only the ability to properly identify “tzora’as” had to be successfully taught right away, not how to become ritually cleansed from it. (That could be taught, if needed, on the “Eighth Day” itself.) With these factors in place, let’s reexamine the structure of the “tzora’as laws.”

The laws of “tzora’as” contain 11 paragraphs, taught to Moshe in three separate communications. [In contrast, there are three paragraphs regarding animals but only one communication (11:1), one paragraph in the one communication regarding childbirth (12:1), and four paragraphs in the one communication regarding bodily emissions (15:1).] The first “tzora’as” communication (13:1) covers skin “tzora’as” and the “tzora’as” of a garment, both of which had to be known as soon as the Mishkan was up and running. The

second (14:1) covers the purification process for a person afflicted with “tzora’as,” which wasn’t needed as soon as the Mishkan was operating, and could have been taught afterwards, if needed. [Although the purification of a garment afflicted with “tzora’as” is included in the first communication, since washing it and seeing what impact it had is part of the process of identifying whether the garment still has “tzora’as” (13:54-57), while also being part of the purification process, the entire purification process was taught together with it.] The third communication (14:33) covers structural “tzora’as.” It would follow, then, that these three sub-sections were told to Moshe separately, who taught them to Aharon and his sons on three separate occasions.

First, Moshe was told teach those laws that had to be known right away. If they didn’t attain a full grasp of these laws, the other laws could wait; they had to be able to properly diagnose skin “tzora’as” and the “tzora’as” on a garment immediately. Since this was a separate “lesson,” and they might have been taught (or reviewed) other “laws of ritual impurity” before returning to the next part of the “tzora’as” curriculum, this lesson ended with a summation that “this is the law of “tzora’as pertaining to a garment” (13:59).

When it became clear that they were ready for the next lesson, and could cover the material during these seven days, there was another divine communication, this one regarding the purification of a person who had “tzora’as,” and introduced as such. However, since this lesson would not be relevant right away (only after a person was diagnosed with “tzora’as,” and the “tzora’as” healed), it is not only introduced by saying “this is the law pertaining to someone who is ready to be purified from “tzora’as” (14:1), but that this “shall be” the law, in the future, i.e. when it becomes relevant. After this lesson was complete, another summation was made (14:32), since there was no guarantee that the third lesson, which wouldn’t become relevant until they entered the Promised Land, would be taught during this week of training (and learning). [As a matter of fact, we don’t know for sure that it was.] Once the third section was taught, though, and the entire curriculum was complete, the final summation is made (14:54-57), with the double-summation indicating that not only is this part of the curriculum done, but the entire syllabus has now been covered. © 2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

