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Home Weekly Parsha METZORA
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah reading of this week deals with the mysterious spiritual disease that caused physical manifestations on the skin of a human being, on the stones of a house or on the fabric of textiles. The rabbis connected the onset of this disease to words of hate and slander. Later generations incorrectly described this disease as being leprosy, but we are now aware that this is not an accurate definition or description of the syndrome that the Torah describes.

What is clear is that the spiritual state of the person, just as the emotional and mental condition of human being, has physical manifestations and greatly influences behavior, appearance and general outlook. The Torah prescribes a process of purification and healing that will allow the victim of this disease to become healthy again and to return to normal society in a rehabilitative fashion.

The Torah emphasizes to us the importance of being part of society and not to remain as an individual isolated from all others and self absorbed in one's own problems and disappointments. This is a very important lesson about life. It is especially important in a society such as ours that has, to a great extent, turned inward and encourages people to think only about themselves and their personal welfare and desires.

In Judaism, being outside of the camp is not seen as a matter of pride or accomplishment. Rather, it is seen only as a temporary expedient in order to help purify one's own spirit and body so that one can return to being part of the general society and to contribute to the welfare of that society.

We have numerous references in the Talmud and in Jewish tradition as to the importance of being connected to society. The rabbis in Avot cautioned us not to separate ourselves from the community. The great holy man Choni HaMa'agol appeals to Heaven to either grant him societal interaction or to allow him to pass on from this world. Naturally, the type of society that the rabbis were talking about is one that strives for justice and morality and retains within it the core of Jewish and Torah values.

A society that is immoral and without a moral compass, a society that flaunts aberrant behavior and justifies even infanticide is not one that we should wish to be attached to or be part of. Such a society must be opposed and if opposition to it is stifled, as unfortunately it is in our time, then separation and isolation from that society is not only justified but necessary.

That is what Maimonides meant when he said that one should go out into the desert and live alone rather than succumb to the values and behavior of an evil society. The dermatological disease described in the Torah may no longer be with us, however the causes for and the effect that it has on society generally, certainly are present in our time. We have to engage in acts of self-purification, and, if necessary, isolation in order to rehabilitate ourselves and society generally.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

The Power of Speech (Metzora 5779)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

As we saw in Parshat Tazria, the Sages identify tzara'at – the condition that affects human skin, the fabric of garments, and the walls of a house – not as an illness but as a punishment, and not for any sin but for one specific sin, that of lashon hara, evil speech.

This prompts the obvious question: Why evil speech and not some other sin? Why should speaking be worse than, say, physical violence? There

is an old English saying: "Sticks and stones may break my bones/but words will never harm me." It is unpleasant to hear bad things said about you, but surely no more than that.

There is not even a direct prohibition against evil speech in the Torah. There is a prohibition against gossip: "Do not go around as a gossip among your people" (Lev. 19:16). Lashon hara is a subset of this larger command. Here is how Maimonides defines it: "There is a far greater sin that falls under this prohibition [of gossip]. It is 'the evil tongue,' which refers to whoever speaks disparagingly of his fellow, even though he speaks the truth."^[1]

The Sages go to remarkable lengths to emphasise its seriousness. It is, they say, as bad as all three cardinal sins together – idol worship, bloodshed, and illicit sexual relations.^[2] Whoever speaks with an evil tongue, they say, is as if he denied God.^[3] They also say: it is forbidden to dwell in the vicinity of any of those with an evil tongue, and all the more to sit with them and to listen to their words.^[4] Why are mere words treated with such seriousness in Judaism?

The answer touches on one of the most basic principles of Jewish belief. There are ancient cultures who worshipped the gods because they saw them as powers: lightning, thunder, the rain and sun, the sea and ocean that epitomised the forces of chaos, and sometimes wild animals that represented danger and fear. Judaism was not a religion that worshipped power, despite the fact that God is more powerful than any pagan deity.

Judaism, like other religions, has holy places, holy people, sacred times, and consecrated rituals. What made Judaism different, however, is that it is supremely a religion of holy words. With words God created the universe: "And God said, Let there be...and there was." Through words He communicated with humankind. In Judaism, language itself is holy. That is why lashon hara, the use of language to harm, is not merely a minor offence. It involves taking something that is holy and using it for purposes that are unholy. It is a kind of desecration.

After creating the universe, God's first gift to the first man was the power to use words to name the animals, and thus to use language to classify. This was the start of the intellectual process that is the distinguishing mark of Homo sapiens. The Targum translates the phrase, "And man became a living creature" (Gen. 2:7) as "a speaking spirit." Evolutionary biologists nowadays take the view that it was the demands of language and the advantage this gave humans over every other life form that led to the massive expansion of the human brain.^[5]

When God sought to halt the plan of the people of Babel to build a tower that would reach heaven, He merely "confused their language" so they were unable to communicate. Language remains basic to the existence of human groups. It was the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century that led to the gradual downplaying of regional dialects in favour of a single shared language across the territory over which a political authority had sovereignty. To this day, differences of language, where they exist within a single nation, are the source of ongoing political and social friction, for example between English and French speakers in Canada; Dutch, French, German, and Walloon speakers in Belgium; and the Spanish and Basque (also known as Euskara) languages in Spain. God created the natural universe with words. We create – and sometimes destroy – the social universe with words.

So the first principle of language in Judaism is that it is creative. We create worlds with words. The second principle is no less fundamental. Abrahamic monotheism introduced into the world the idea of a God who transcends the universe, and who therefore cannot be identified with any

phenomenon within the universe. God is invisible. Hence in Judaism all religious images and icons are a sign of idolatry.

How then does an invisible God reveal Himself? Revelation was not a problem for polytheism. The pagans saw gods in the panoply of nature that surrounds us, making us feel small in its vastness and powerless in the face of its fury. A God who cannot be seen or even represented in images demands an altogether different kind of religious sensibility. Where can such a God be found?

The answer again is: in words. God spoke. He spoke to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses. At the revelation at Mount Sinai, as Moses reminded the Israelites, “The Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Deut. 4:12). In Judaism, words are the vehicle of revelation. The prophet is the man or woman who hears and speaks the word of God. That was the phenomenon that neither Spinoza nor Einstein could understand. They could accept the idea of a God who created heaven and earth, the force of forces and cause of causes, the originator of, as we call it nowadays, the Big Bang, the God who was the architect of matter and the composer of order. God, Einstein famously said, “does not play dice with the universe.” Indeed, it is ultimately faith in the universe as the product of a single creative intelligence that underlies the scientific mindset from the outset.

Judaism calls this aspect of God Elokim. But we believe in another aspect of God also, which we call Hashem, the God of relationship – and relationship exists by virtue of speech. For it is speech that allows us to communicate with others and share with them our fears, hopes, loves, plans, feelings, and intentions. Speech allows us to convey our inwardness to others. It is at the very heart of the human bond. A God who could create universes but not speak or listen would be an impersonal god – a god incapable of understanding what makes us human. Worshipping such a god would be like bowing down to the sun or to a giant computer. We might care about it but it could not care about us. That is not the God of Abraham.

Words are remarkable in another way as well. We can use language not just to describe or assert. We can use it to create new moral facts. The Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin called this special use of language “performative utterance.”[6] The classic example is making a promise. When I make a promise, I create an obligation that did not exist before. Nietzsche believed that the ability to make a promise was the birth of morality and human responsibility.[7]

Hence the idea at the heart of Judaism: brit, covenant, which is nothing other than a mutually binding promise between God and human beings. What defines the special relationship between the Jewish people and God is not that He brought them from slavery to freedom. He did that, says the prophet Amos, to other people as well: “Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Arameans from Kir?” (Amos 9:7). It is the fact that at Sinai, God and Israel entered into a mutual pledge that linked them in an everlasting bond.

Covenant is the word that joins heaven and earth, the word spoken, the word heard, the word affirmed and honoured in trust. For that reason, Jews were able to survive exile. They may have lost their home, their land, their power, their freedom, but they still had God’s word, the word He said He would never break or rescind. The Torah, in the most profound sense, is the word of God, and Judaism is the religion of holy words.

It follows that to misuse or abuse language to sow suspicion and dissension is not just destructive. It is sacrilege. It takes something holy, the human ability to communicate and thus join soul to soul, and use it for the lowest of purposes, to divide soul from soul and destroy the trust on which non-coercive relationships depend.

That, according to the Sages, is why the speaker of lashon hara was smitten by leprosy and forced to live as a pariah outside the camp. The punishment was measure for measure:

What is special about the person afflicted with tzara’at that the Torah says, “He shall live alone; he must live outside the camp” (Lev. 13:46)? The Holy One, Blessed Be He, said, “Since this person sought to create division between man and wife, or a person and his neighbour, [he is punished by being divided from the community], which is why it says, ‘Let him live alone, outside the camp.’”[8]

Language, in Judaism, is the basis of creation, revelation, and the moral life. It is the air we breathe as social beings. Hence the statement in Proverbs (18:21), “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Likewise, the verse in Psalms, “Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies” (Ps. 34:13–14).

Judaism emerged as an answer to a series of questions: How can finite human beings be connected to an infinite God? How can they be connected to one another? How can there be co-operation, collaboration, collective action, families, communities, and a nation, without the coercive use of power? How can we form relationships of trust? How can we redeem the human person from his or her solitude? How can we create collective liberty such that my freedom is not bought at the cost of yours?

The answer is: through words, words that communicate, words that bind, words that honour the Divine Other and the human other. Lashon hara, “evil speech,” by poisoning language, destroys the very basis of the Judaic vision. When we speak disparagingly of others, we diminish them, we diminish ourselves, and we damage the very ecology of freedom.

That is why the Sages take lashon hara so seriously, why they regard it as the gravest of sins, and why they believe that the entire phenomenon of tzara’at, leprosy in people, mildew in clothes and houses, was God’s way of making it public and stigmatised.

Never take language lightly, implies the Torah. For it was through language that God created the natural world, and through language that we create and sustain our social world. It is as essential to our survival as the air we breathe.
Shabbat shalom

God's Tefillin **Rav Kook Torah**

“The Holy One wears tefillin” (Berachot 6a).

For a strictly monotheistic religion that rejects all forms of Divine corporeality, this is a peculiar statement. God has no head and arm on which to tie tefillin; so what did the Sages mean by this?

Higher Purpose

To understand the meaning of tefillin for God, we must first understand the meaning of tefillin for us.

We utilize our intelligence and talents to meet our physical needs. We plan and calculate, struggle and toil, in order to acquire food, clothing, shelter, and so on. This is the natural use of our intellect and will.

However, life is meant to be more than just satisfying material needs. We should utilize our higher functions - our powers of intellect and resolve, imagination and emotions - to dedicate our lives to ethical and spiritual growth. This is the foundation of our service of God.

To impress upon us this higher use for our intellect and will, we secure the tefillah shel rosh over the mind, and bind the tefillah shel yad on the arm, opposite the heart.

These two levels - the natural and the spiritual - also exist in the world at large. At the basic level, the laws of nature ensure that the universe

functions and living things grow. The world's order and equilibrium are governed by the laws of physics, biology and chemistry.

Yet there is another, higher dimension. The universe has an inner drive that seeks to uplift humanity and all of creation to a lofty moral state. The imagery of "God wearing tefillin" is a beautiful metaphor for the universe's spiritual yearnings. It portrays a universe that is guided by an inner drive for holiness and spiritual advance.

Inside God's Tefillin

Our tefillin contain verses that describe God's unity and providence. If God wears tefillin, then what is written in these tefillin?

Encased inside God's tefillin, the Sages taught, are verses that speak of the Jewish people and their unique mission. "Who is like Your people Israel, a unique nation in the world?" (II Sam. 7:23)

God made a special covenant with the Jewish people, and He gave them the Torah so that they would act as a catalyst for the world's moral ascent. If "God's tefillin" is a metaphor for the world's inner drive for spiritual advance, then it follows that they should contain scrolls that refer to the vehicle for that ascent: the people of Israel.

Future Vision and Present State

The Sages taught that these verses praising the people of Israel are written in both components of God's tefillin, in the tefillah tied to the head as well as in the one tied on the arm.

The tefillah shel rosh, worn above the eyes, indicates the future vision. This corresponds to the final goal, when the world will attain its lofty future state due to the positive influence of Israel and Torah on humanity over time. The verses inside God's tefillah shel rosh accordingly speak of the Jewish people and their special mission.

The tefillah shel yad, bound to the arm, represents the here-and-now, the practical aspect of repairing the world. The Sages wanted to stress that even in the world's current state, God watches over the Jewish people and protects the righteous. Israel's Divine providence is an integral part of the process that will lead to the world's future state. Therefore, even God's tefillah shel yad contains a reference to the special destiny of the Jewish people.

(The Splendor of Tefillin. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol I, Berachot I:52)

See also: Nissan: 'How Splendid This Tree is!'

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Metzora

For the week ending 13 April 2019 / 8 Nisan 5779

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Thermometer of the Soul

"This is the law of the Metzora..." (14:2)

My son made up a joke which had me in stitches. I'm not so sure I'll be able to put it across in words, but let's have a go.

You need two props for this: an empty cigarette box and one match. You put the two on the table and you say, "Imagine you're locked in a darkened cellar full of mice and all you have is an empty cigarette box and a match. How do you get rid of the mice?" After your audience has scratched its collective head for a suitably frustrating amount of time, you pick up the match and stick it between one of the glued folds of paper in the cigarette box lid so that it's protruding a little like an aerial. Then you pick up the box and bring it close to your mouth and make a 'squelch' sound of a walkie-talkie. "Chhhhhh! All mice please leave! All mice please leave!" (It sounds better in the original Hebrew: "Kol Ha'achbarim l'tzet! Kol Ha-achbarim l'tzet!")

I probably haven't succeeded in splitting your sides with this little anecdote, but I was so beside myself with laughter that I came close to transgressing the prohibition not to 'fill our mouths with laughter' until the coming of Mashiach (the Messiah). It got me thinking about words and how powerful they are. The right words in the right order at the right time can bring you to heaving with uncontrollable laughter. The wrong words can permanently scar a life.

In this week's Torah portion, we learn of the purification process for the Metzora. The world Metzora is usually mistranslated as "leprosy." Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch gives many reasons why Metzora cannot mean the disease that we call "leprosy." Rather, Metzora was a malady

of the soul which manifested itself as lesions on the skin. Metzora can be understood as an acronym for motzi shem rah — literally, "bringing out a bad name." Metzora afflicted someone who spreads damaging gossip. The power of words can be physical. Anyone who has cracked up at a joke knows that. Even though our bodies still react to our physical, mental and emotional health, our bodies are no longer sensitive to our spiritual health. We have lost Metzora — the thermometer of the soul.

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OU Torah

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Metzarah: Miserly Marnar

I no longer remember the name of my ninth-grade teacher of English literature. But I do remember well one of his important lessons. He taught us that there are many great works of literature that are misunderstood. These are books which are commonly thought to be concerned with one specific theme but are really about something else entirely.

To illustrate his point, he included George Eliot's famous novel, *Silas Marner*, in our list of assigned readings. He pointed out to us that even well-educated individuals assume that this work is all about a pathological miser and is essentially a psychological study of miserly behavior. He thus demonstrated to us that one of the common clues in the highbrow New York Times crossword puzzle is "miserly Marner," for which the correct response is "Silas." The creator of the crossword puzzle is confident that he can safely assume that even his sophisticated audience will readily associate "miserly" with the hero of Eliot's novel.

Yet, after the class had completed the assignment and read the great novel, we all knew well that miserliness was only a secondary, and quite incidental, theme in this work. On the contrary, the book was a study of several significant issues, ranging from religion to industrialization to community.

Many years later, it occurred to me that my freshman teacher of English literature was on to something that applied not only to classic English literature, but that also could be applied to the weekly Torah portions. Many, even ardent students of the weekly parsha fail to identify important themes, and very substantial lessons, in the Torah portion.

This week's parsha is a case in point. We will be reading Metzarah (Leviticus 14:1-15:33). Most of us assume that the content of this Torah reading is limited to its title, Metzarah, usually translated as a "leper." On the surface, this assumption is true. It is all about symptoms of a once common and fairly widespread disease, usually identified with leprosy. As such, this Torah portion heads the list of those passages in the Torah which seem irrelevant to contemporary life and which have little to teach us about human conduct.

But the rabbis thought otherwise. Famously, they saw the connection between the Hebrew word *metzora*, leper, and the Hebrew phrase *motzi ra*, "he who expresses malice." They go further and maintain that the disease is a punishment for the egregious sin of spreading malicious gossip, and countless rabbinic sermons have used this week's Torah portion as a springboard for a lecture about the evils of maligning others and of the abuse of the gift of speech.

But there is another, lesser-known, hidden theme in this week's Torah portion which the rabbis of the Talmud have identified. For *metzarah*, besides being a contraction of the two words *motzi ra*, can also be decoded as a contraction of the two words *tzar ayin*, "narrow eyes," a Hebrew euphemism for miserly behavior. A stingy person is referred to in Hebrew as a *tzar ayin*, a narrow-eyed individual, one who selfishly sees only himself and does not see the needs of another.

The source of this approach is to be found in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Arachin* 16a, which includes *tzarut ayin*, stinginess, as one of the sins for which "leprosy" is a punishment. The Talmud finds a basis for this contention in the phrase to be found in chapter 14 verse 35, which describes the procedure to be followed when an individual discovers a "leprous blemish" in "his" house. The school of Rabbi Ishmael taught

that such bizarre blemishes were the consequences of the sinful attitude of one who thinks that his “house” is his and his alone, and who selfishly does not share his possessions with others.

Representatives of the nineteenth-century Mussar movement, which emphasized the central importance of ethical behavior in Jewish religious practice, used this week’s Torah portion to severely criticize miserliness and undue emphasis upon the retention of one’s possessions. Thus, one of the leaders of this movement, Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, known as “the ‘Alter (Old Man)’ of Kelm” writes at length about the “shameful behavior of kamtzanut (stinginess).”

Rabbi Ziv, whom I’ll refer to from hereon as “the Alter,” delves into medieval rabbinic literature and finds a treasure trove of quotations condemning miserliness, and which find miserly behavior widespread in the communities in which they lived.

One example is this quotation from the work known as *Sefer HaYashar*, “The Book of the Upright,” which is attributed to one of the outstanding leaders of French Jewry in the twelfth century, Rabbenu Tam: “An individual’s miserliness is not limited to just one aspect of his overall behavior. Rather, the stingy person will fail to perform even basic mitzvot, good deeds, because he sees no benefit to be gained from performing them. If performing such good deeds will cost him even a minute monetary loss, he will find all sorts of excuses to avoid performing those good deeds. His stinginess will make it impossible for him to be a truly pious person.”

Interestingly, and almost paradoxically, the Alter finds that the character trait of miserliness is not always a negative one. It is sometimes praiseworthy, particularly when it is utilized as an antidote to a very different negative trait, namely undue extravagance. The Alter recognizes that whereas many individuals in the communities with which he was familiar were overly stingy, there were many who were given to excessive spending, often falling into irreversible debt in the process. He has no difficulty in finding earlier rabbinic authorities who condemn excessive spending as well as miserly selfishness.

In a collection of the Alter’s personal correspondence, we have an example of just how careful he encouraged his students to be in order to avoid profligate spending. In a letter to three of his young students, he urges them to conserve the stationery at their disposal and join together in writing letters to him on just one sheet of paper. He concludes his letter thus: “Remember that spending even one penny for naught is a violation of the prohibition against waste.”

The Alter’s insistence that one strike a balance between selfish stinginess and wasteful spending is a useful teaching for those of us who live in today’s affluent society. Often, we adopt distorted priorities and practice thrift with regard to important societal causes, and spend excessively on frivolous ones.

As always, Maimonides said it best when he advocated what has come to be called the “golden mean,” and advised us to carefully contemplate the downsides of extreme behaviors and adopt moderation in all of our endeavors.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message – Metzora 5779-2019

“The Ultimate Value and Sanctity of Human Life in Judaism”

(Revised and updated from Metzora 5760-2000)

This week’s parasha, parashat Metzora, continues the Torah’s focus on the “intriguing” skin disease *tzaraat*, discussed in last week’s parasha, Tazria. According to tradition, *tzaraat*, is an affliction that results from speaking *lashon hara*—Lashon Hara, speaking evil against others (see Tazria 5763-2003). Parashat Metzora, also describes the ritual purification necessary for a person who has recovered from *tzaraat*, and informs us how *tzaraat*, besides appearing on one’s body and clothes, may also appear on the walls of a person’s home.

The final chapter of parashat Metzora, concerns menstrual and seminal flows. Since the early chapters of parashat Metzora deal with the ritual of purification of a person who has recovered from *tzaraat*, it follows

logically that the rules regulating the person contaminated by bodily flows be included in this parasha as well.

It is often maintained, that the bottom line of all of Judaism is the sanctity of human life, and that the ultimate purpose of every single mitzvah and ritual in Judaism can probably be traced to Judaism’s high regard for the ultimate sanctity of human life.

This supreme regard for human life is reflected in many of the rituals and practices of Judaism. For instance, upon waking in the morning, one immediately recites *Modeh Ani*, thanking G-d for restoring one’s soul, followed by vigorously washing one’s hands with water—the ultimate source of all life. Since sleep itself is a state of unconsciousness and the closest contact that a living human being has with death, the need to reaffirm life is vital.

Judaism’s value for human life is also reflected in the mundane practices that are often incorporated in daily life, such as tying one’s shoes “properly.” According to Jewish custom, one should put on their right shoe first, followed by their left shoe, tie the left shoe, and then return to tie the right shoe. This is done in order to underscore the need to show sensitivity toward the limbs of one’s body. How much more sensitive must one be toward fellow human beings by not showing undue favoritism to one person over another. Clearly, the bottom line of all of Judaism is the sanctity of human life.

Perhaps the most profound indication that Judaism values human life above all else, comes from a series of intriguing laws that are found in parashat Metzora. These laws are not only challenging, but, at first blush, appear to be primitive and offsetting. In Leviticus 15:1-18, G-d admonishes Moses and Aaron to instruct the Jewish people and to tell all the men, that any man who has a discharge, specifically, a seminal flow from his body, is to be considered *tamay* (for lack of a better word we will translate this word as ritually impure). In order to be cleansed from that impurity, the person who has the discharge must wash his clothes and immerse in the mikveh at night. The more discharges a person experiences, the more impure one is, requiring a longer period of impurity and additional cleansing rituals.

A woman, too, is subject to the laws of ritual purity and impurity. The Torah states, Leviticus 15:19-30, that if a woman experiences bleeding at the time of her regular monthly period she is in a state of *niddah*, ritual impurity. Once the bleeding ceases, she is to go to the Mikveh. The practice today, is for women to first count seven clean days and subsequently bathe in the mikveh.

The Torah also speaks of other blood flows that do not coincide with the normal period, known as *zavah*, which renders the woman impure. After a single flow, she is impure for only a single day. If it continues to flow, she may, at times, be impure for seven full days. Today, because we are unable to distinguish between menstrual blood and non-menstrual blood, all women are required to keep a minimum of five days of menstrual flow, plus a seven day period of no bleeding before they visit the mikveh.

As uncomfortable as we may be when discussing these issues, the *niddah* laws are among the most enlightened in human culture, and ultimately reflect Judaism’s uncompromising belief in the sanctity of human life.

In Judaism, there is nothing more sanctified than human life, and nothing more defiling than death. Death, consequently, is regarded as the ultimate defiler. In ancient times, a person who came in contact with death would be defiled for seven days. To be purified, the impure person would need to be sprinkled with the waters of the red heifer, on the third and seventh day of impurity, and then bathe in a mikveh on the night of the eighth.

Although contact with death was not uncommon in ancient times, many of us, in contemporary times, have become rather inured to death. The constant reports, especially through modern technology, of vast numbers of deaths and disasters, have made it virtually impossible to feel a sincere sense of mourning or sadness for the losses. The most common reaction to death these days is often to ignore the discomfort and turn to the sports, fashion, or business reports.

Judaism is determined not to allow human beings to become indifferent to death, because those who are indifferent to death, inevitably become insensitive to life. That is why Judaism required that any time a person came in contact with death in any way, needed to reaffirm life. The ancients would reaffirm life by going to the mikveh, a pool containing “living waters,” the source of all life; after all, humans are composed of 90 percent water. Immersing in a mikveh is comparable to returning to the primordial state of creation, where there was only water (Genesis 1:2). Mikveh is, in effect, a rebirth experience, akin to returning to the womb.

Similarly, the Torah declares, that whoever comes in contact with potential life, such as semen, or an ovum that is not fertilized and has been instead ejected from the body and dies, also needs to reaffirm life by going to the mikveh. In ancient times, men as well as women were required to go to the mikveh to experience this reaffirmation.

Since we have no Beit HaMikdash, no Holy Temple, and no waters of the red heifer, we are unable to properly cleanse ourselves from death’s ultimate contamination. Thus, we are all today in a state of perpetual ritual impurity, since we all, at some point, come in contact with death. Consequently, the laws of mikveh and purification do not apply in contemporary times—with one exception: the requirement that women go to the mikveh at the conclusion of their menstrual period. The legal reason for continuing this regulation is because having relations with a woman who is a menstruant is a separate prohibition recorded in the Torah, in both Leviticus 18 and 20.

Although no reason is given why that particular element of these laws should be practiced even in non-Temple times, it has been speculated that it is because these laws serve a vital second function.

Clearly, the sexual desires are among the most powerful human drives. The power of the sexual drive is so great that it has the ability to obfuscate other types of relationships, especially spiritual relationships. One who is obsessed with sexuality rarely has the ability to properly or meaningfully express love or spiritual emotions—since the basic animalistic drives often take over. Consequently, we frequently lose the ability to declare to our loved ones, “I love you because of who you are, rather than because of what I can get from you.”

The Torah, therefore, mandates that during a period of each month, when the woman menstruates, sexual contact cease. During that time, husband and wife reaffirm their love for one another—reaffirming their spiritual love, rather than sexual attraction. The laws that regulate this behavior are known as the laws of *טהרת המיטות*—*Taharat Ha’mishapchah*, Family Purity, and have had a powerful and meritorious impact on Jewish family life throughout Jewish history.

These complex laws of bodily emissions and purifications, which seem so crude at first blush, are truly enlightened. Indeed, one need not believe in G-d in order to benefit from the brilliance and efficacy of Torah rituals, and these laws are the perfect example.

Please note: This Shabbat, the Shabbat immediately preceding Passover, is known as Shabbat Hagadol, the Great Shabbat. On this Shabbat, we read a special Haftarah taken from the words of the prophet Malachi 3:4-24, in which we find the verse: “Behold I send to you Elijah the Prophet, before the great and awesome day of G-d.” For more information on Shabbat Hagadol, see parashat Tzav 5762-2002.

The first two days of the joyous festival of Passover will be observed this year on Friday night, April 19th, and all day Saturday and Sunday, April 20th and 21st, 2019.

May you be blessed.

Drasha - Parshas Tazria

Gold in them Thar Walls

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

This week, in reading both Tazria and Metzorah, we combine portions that deal with the physio-spiritual plague of tzora’as. Tzora’as is a discoloration that appears in varying forms on human skin, on hair, clothing, and even on the walls of one’s home. The afflicted individual must endure a complicated process of purification in order to rejoin the community. The Talmud explains that tzoraas is a divine punishment for

the sins of slander and gossip. In fact, the Talmud in Arachin 16b comments that the reason that the afflicted is sent out of the camp was because “he separated friends and families through his words, and deserves to be separated from his community.”

Rashi and the Ramban explain that the first form of tzora’as does not begin on the person. Hashem in His mercy first strikes at inanimate objects — one’s possessions. The discoloration first appears on the walls of a home, forcing the affected stones to be removed and destroyed. If that event does not succeed as a wake-up-call, and the person continues his malevolent activities, then his clothing is affected. If that fails, eventually the flesh is transformed and white lesions appear, forcing the afflicted to leave the Jewish camp until the plague subsides and the Kohen declares him acceptable to return.

Rashi tells us that the first stage of tzora’as — the home — is actually a blessing in disguise. Tzora’as on a home can indeed bring fortune to the affected. As the Israelites were approaching the Land of Canaan, the inhabitants, figuring that one day they would re-conquer the land, hid all their gold and silver inside the walls of their homes. When one dislodged the afflicted stones of his home he would find the hidden treasures that were left by the fleeing Canaanites.

It is troubling. Why should the first warning of tzora’as reek of triumph? What message is Hashem sending to the first offender by rewarding his misdeeds with a cache of gold? What spiritual import is gained from the materialistic discovery?

After the end of World War II, the brilliant and flamboyant Torah sage, Rabbi Eliezer Silver visited and aided thousands of survivors in displaced persons camps in Germany and Poland who were waiting to find permanent homes. One day, as he was handing out Siddurim (prayerbooks) and other Torah paraphernalia, a Jewish man flatly refused to accept any.

“After the way I saw Jews act in the camp, I don’t want to have any connection with religion!”

Rabbi Silver asked him to explain what exactly had turned him off from Jewish practice.

“I saw a Jew who had a Siddur, yet he only allowed it to be used by the inmates in exchange for their daily bread ration. Imagine,” he sneered, “a Jew selling the right to daven for bread!”

“And how many customers did this man get?” inquired Rabbi Silver.

“Far too many!” snapped the man.

Rabbi Silver put his hand around the gentlemen and gently explained. “Why are you looking at the bad Jew who sold the right to pray? Why don’t you look at the many good Jews who were willing to forego their rations and starve, just in order to pray? Isn’t that the lesson you should take with you?”

Perhaps Hashem in His compassion is sending much more to the gossipier than a get-rich-quick scheme. He shows the first-time slanderer to look a little deeper at life. On the outside he may see a dirty wall of a former Canaanite home. Dig a little deeper and you will find gold in them thar walls. Next time you look at a person only superficially — think. Dig deeper. There is definitely gold beneath the surface. Sometimes you have to break down your walls to find the gold you never thought it existed.

Rabbi Eliezer Silver (1881-1968) was a prominent figure in the emerging American Torah Community. A powerful, witty and brilliant leader, he came to America as a Rabbi in Harrisburg, PA and ended his career as Rabbi of Cincinatti, OH. He was a founder of the Vaad Hatzalah during World War II. Good Shabbos!

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Metzorah

House With Tzaraas: Blessing or Curse?

Dedicated in memory of HaChazzan Sherwoord Goffin a"h

Parshas Metzora deals with blemishes that appear on the walls of homes in Eretz Yisrael (“upon a house in the land of your possession”) [Vayikra 14:34]. Rashi quotes the famous Medrash that the Torah is informing the Jewish people of “good news.” Encountering Tzaraas on the walls of someone’s house is a cloud with a silver lining. “The Emorites hid gold treasure in the walls of their houses all forty years that Israel was in the desert, and as a result of the Tzaraas affliction, the Jew will need to break down the walls of his house, and he’ll find the hidden treasure.”

The Sefas Emes asks, if the Almighty wants to give a person treasure, there are many easier ways than having to break down the walls of his house. So, is it a punishment or a gift? If it is a punishment, let it be a punishment. If it is a present, give it properly, gift-wrapped with a bow on top!

Many years ago, we quoted an amazing insight from the Chidushei HaRim, the grandfather of the Sefas Emes. The Torah says that when Klal Yisrael left Egypt, “And the Children of Israel did according to the word of Moshe and they asked (va’yishalu) the Egyptians for silver vessels and golden vessels and items of clothing.” [Shemos 12:35] The Jews left Egypt enriched. The term va’yishalu is peculiar because it literally means borrowing, and everyone knows that the Jewish people were not borrowing these items – they did not ever intend to return them. Then why does the Torah say that they borrowed from the Egyptians?

The Chidushei HaRim suggests a powerful thought. This is the first time that the Jewish people, as a nation, are coming into wealth. The Torah teaches us a basic principle about money. As we all know, money has the capacity to be a great blessing, but it also has the capacity to be a great curse. Hashem tells the Israelites: You are coming into money for the first time. Do you know how you need to look at money? “Let them ask (va’yishalu)...” Money is always borrowed. Hashem is lending us money. We have stewardship over it. He wants us to use it in the proper way, but we need to know “The money is mine and the gold is mine, the Word of Hashem, Master of Legions.” [Chagga 2:8] It is His money. He is lending it to us. To make this point, Hashem tells the Children of Israel: Listen here, you are going to have money now. For the rest of your history, money is going to be a factor, a big factor. I am telling you, look at money as, “And one man asked for from his fellow man (Va’yishalu ish mei’es ray-eihu)”. It is a loan. It is not yours. Do not ever think, “It is my money. I made it.” No. It is His money and He is giving me the privilege of taking care of His money. That sets the tone.

This, explains the sefer Milchamos Yehudah, answers the Sefas Emes’s question regarding why they needed to find the treasures by tearing down the houses. The Ribono shel Olam is teaching us a second lesson about money: Money can destroy houses. Money can destroy a family. The message is that if a person is not careful, money can cause him to rip apart a home. There is a message in that. The message is that such can be the power of money. It can destroy a person’s home.

If someone has any doubt about that, speak to lawyers who deal with estates and how much argument comes about because of money and wills. Money can tear families asunder. The only people who benefit from that are estate attorneys. Sometimes the lawyers’ fees exceed the amount of money remaining for the inheritors! This is the symbolism of Hashem giving the Jews the money, but providing them with it in a way that it was necessary to destroy their homes to acquire it.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Metzora

פרשת מצורע תשעט

זאת תהיה תורת המצורע ביום שחרתו והובא אל הכהן

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

Chazal (Arachin 15) Reish Lakish said: “What is the meaning of that which is written, ‘This shall be the law of the *motzi shem ra* (slanderer)?” Chazal equate the affliction of *tzaraas* with the prohibition against *motzi shem ra*, slander. One who resorts to evil/defamatory speech will deservedly become afflicted with *tzaraas*, spiritual leprosy (for lack of a better term). Certain aspects of *tzaraas/motzi shem ra* should be addressed. Shlomo Hamelech says (Mishlei 18:21), *Ha’ma’ves v’ha’chaim b’yad ha’lashon*; “Death and life are in the hand (power) of the tongue.” This often - quoted *pasuk* is most identified with *lashon hora*, evil speech. The tongue has enormous powers: positive, life-sustaining – as well as devastating, death-inducing – powers. It is up to the person to determine how he uses his mouth. Since the *pasuk* seems to address the power of the tongue, it should have said so: *ma’ves v’chaim b’lashon*. Why does it add *b’yad ha’lashon*, in the hand of the tongue? What does the hand have to do with it?

Another area that begs elucidation is the *Kohen’s* function *vis-à-vis* the *tumah* process of *tzaraas*. No other *tumah*, ritual contamination, is dependent upon the *Kohen* uttering the word, *tamei*, “impure.” This is true even if there is no question concerning the affliction; it is clearly *tzaraas*. Yet, until the *Kohen* gives the “word,” the person remains clean/pure. This is true even when all signs of affliction have disappeared, and the person is clearly healed; unless the *Kohen* gives the word – *tahor*, the *metzora* remains in his state of impurity. Why?

Last is the manner in which the afflicted person presents himself and his plague to the *Kohen*. The Torah insists that he say: *K’nega niraah li*, “It seems to me that I have seen a *nega*.” He may not make a definitive statement: *Nega niraah li*; “I have seen a *nega*.” In other words, the afflicted person must rely solely upon the *Kohen’s* decision, specifically the *Kohen’s* articulation of the word *tamei*. The rendering of *tumah* had to be enunciated by the *Kohen*; indeed, in the event that *Kohen* was not well-versed in *Hilchos negaim*, the laws that apply to plagues, he was required to summon a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, to view the affliction and to make the decision regarding its impure status. Then – after he had made the decision and conveyed it to the *Kohen*, the *Kohen* vocalized the word, *tamei*. Does this not beg elucidation? Does the *Kohen’s* verbalization of the *Halachic* status of this person render him *tamei*? Since when does a state of being depend on defining it by oral expression?

The purification process, which the Torah describes for the *metzora*, employs the use of cedar wood and hyssop, crimson wool dyed with the pigment of a worm. *Rashi* explains that the *metzora* should lower himself from his arrogance (cedar wood) like a worm (a low crawling creature) and like a hyssop (an herb which does not grow very high). In other words, these three items are to imbue the *metzora* with a sense of humility.

This implies that the sin of the *metzora* is generated by excessive pride. How does this reconcile with the earlier *Midrash* which attributes the transgression of the *metzora* to speaking slanderous speech?

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, explains that unmitigated, excessive pride in oneself lies at the very crux of the sin of *motzi shem ra*. The fellow who slanders, who speaks ill, of his fellow man often justifies his nefarious comments with comments such as, “Well, I am only speaking the truth. Check it out. I am not saying anything new. Everyone knows that so and so is a dangerous, wicked swindler, etc.” He does not view his “commentary” as sinful. On the contrary, he considers himself a saint for performing a public service for the community. He is capable of taking any situation involving his fellow man and vilifying it, transforming what might have been ambiguous behavior to the nadir of infamy.

The *motzei shem ra* considers himself a *tzaddik*, righteous person. Because he is so wrapped up in himself, he does not see lucidly. He views the actions of others who do not see eye-to-eye with him as contemptuous. Thus, he maligns anyone who, in his distorted arrogance, does not agree with or support him.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* adds that the term, “weapon of destruction”, which most often refers to the tongue, is not exclusive to the tongue. There are times when a well-timed gesture of contempt, such as a wave/flip of the hand (a dismissal of the man and his reputation), is equally defamatory and destructive. Sometimes it is the tongue and, other times, it is the “hand.” This is what is meant by “the hand of the tongue.”

The source of the problem, the origin of *motzi shem ra*/slander, defamation of character in its various forms, is a lack of humility. Excessive pride, foolish misplaced haughtiness, and downright crude arrogance are all responsible for the slanderer’s slander. We define people and their actions through a misguided lens of subjectivity – to fit our envious nature. If we would not be victims of gross arrogance, we would view ourselves as inappropriate to pass judgment concerning the activities, character motivations, of others. One who lacks humility finds himself hard-pressed to refrain from judging others – and, for the most part, rendering a subjective judgment based on personal envy.

Furthermore, when the support system that provokes his low opinion of his fellow is his personal arrogance, he sticks to his guns, maintaining his propriety, despite all of the proof to the contrary. Arrogance deludes; arrogance born of envy and low self-esteem corrupts one’s mind and actions. The latter type of person never agrees with reason. Thus, his first step toward humility, and

eventual *teshuvah* and purification, is to come to the *Kohen*, the individual who is totally dedicated to Hashem, and say, “*K’nega niraah li*, “It seems to me that I might have seen a plague.” Humble, unpretentious – this is how he should approach the *Kohen*. Then we can hope for a cure. He now realizes that pronouncements are not made by people whose subjective leanings cloud their judgment. The *Kohen* views life and people through the lens of clarity – the lens of Torah.

Limud z’chus, judging people favorably, giving people the benefit of the doubt, is much more than an exhortation against a subjective/negative outlook on people. It means simply that unless one knows for certain that there is a negative twist to what he has just seen, he must take a positive, favorable outlook. This can, at times, distinguish between life and death. No dearth of stories demonstrates the error of negative judgment of others, but the following is an instance (which could happen to any one of us, at any time and in any place). This incident took place in the famous *Lederman Shul*, but it could have happened anywhere.

This story was related first-hand by the *gabbai* of the second *Netz*, sunrise, *minyán* in the *Lederman Shul*. There are two daily simultaneous *minyanim* at *Netz*. The large *minyán* convenes in the large street-level *beis medrash*. The second *minyán* is the quicker one and meets upstairs. On the day in question, the upstairs *minyán* had some difficulty putting together a *minyán*. They finally had ten men and began *davening*. Alas, when it came to *chazaras ha’Shatz*, repeating the *Shemoneh Esrai*, one of the worshippers “ran” and they now had only nine men. The *gabbai* went outside and discovered the elusive tenth man sitting outside, seemingly relaxed, hands folded, almost as if he did not have a care in the world. “Why did you leave?” the *Gabbai* asked. “We need you.” “I cannot go back. There is no air. I cannot breathe in there,” was the man’s reply.

“What do you mean there is no air? There are ceiling fans that are circulating the air. The windows are open. There is plenty of air.” (Veritably, Bnei Brak does get quite hot and humid in the summer. I assume that, even if the incident occurred in the summer, since it was early morning, it was still cool.)

The *gabbai* was visibly upset, but seeing that the man was not moving, he left to look for another tenth man. This is how the story should have ended. Sadly, this is not how it ended. The original tenth man waited outside until his wife concluded *davening*. (She, too, had joined him daily for *netz Shacharis*.) He then told her that he did not feel well and could not breathe. They immediately went to Maaynei Ha’Yeshua Hospital, where the emergency room doctors checked him out. By the time they confirmed that he had suffered a serious heart-attack, he had passed on to his eternal rest!

Now, let us catch our breath and go back a few hours to the time when the *gabbai* had confronted the man who was complaining of a lack of air and ask ourselves: Would our response have differed from that of the *gabbai*? Probably not. The man was young, strong, and in seemingly good health. I am positing that the end would not have been different. *Hashem Yisborach* determines this. Imagine, however, having to live with the idea, in the back of one’s mind, that had he given greater credence to the man’s reiterating that he lacked air – the story’s conclusion might have been different.

It does not have to be a heart attack. It could be depression or a host of other causes of a person’s unusual behavior. It does not mean that he is “strange,” in a bad mood, etc. By taking people seriously, we might prevent something serious from happening to them.

זאת תהיה תורת המצרע ביום שחרתו והוא אל הכהן

This shall be the law of the *metzora* on the day of his purifications: He shall be brought to the *Kohen*. (14:2)

Modesty, privacy, *hatznea leches*, is a principle to which we should all adhere. The *Navi Michah* exhorts us to “walk modestly with Hashem” (*Michah* 6:8). When a person acts modestly in public, it is easier to feel a sense of pride and have ulterior motives (even) when serving Hashem. When a person acts modestly in private, these ulterior motives are not an issue, since no one sees him.

The *Noam Elimelech* observes that this is true only when one wishes to come close to Hashem via his service. He must walk on the path of modesty. The *baal teshuvah*, penitent, who originally had transgressed publicly with such sins as slander, defamation of character, and evil speech must necessarily repent in public as well. This follows the *halachah* of *K’bo’lo kach polto*, “in the manner in which it was swallowed, so it is expelled” (*Pesachim* 30b). According to this law, in the same manner that a forbidden thing is either ingested or absorbed, it is expelled. Thus, a sin that is committed in private should have its repentance performed in private, hidden from people. A sin that was committed publicly, flagrantly, should have its repentance, likewise, performed on the public stage.

This is all fine from the perspective of atoning for the sin, but how can *teshuvah* be carried out publicly, where there is the issue of ulterior motives with which to contend? If the penitent is “plagued” by ulterior motives, the attention grabbing aspect of the public domain is seriously undermined and his act of repentance flawed.

The *Lishensker* (*Noam Elimelech/Rebbe Elimelech* of Lishensk) explains that this is why the *metzora* must go to the righteous leader, the *Kohen*,

whose life is devoted unequivocally to Hashem and His service. When one comes in contact with such spiritual integrity as evinced by the *Kohen*, who stands at the apex of spiritual demeanor, the penitent no longer has thoughts of ulterior motives. The *Rebbe* explains that the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination (which is the force behind the ulterior motives), has no power when a totally righteous person challenges it. Furthermore, the *baal teshuvah* observes the actions of the *tzaddik* and is so inspired that ulterior motives do not play a role in his life. Indeed, he is inspired to ask himself, “How can I take pride in my deeds (ulterior motives), when I compare them to the actions of the true *tzaddik*?”

The Torah teaches us: “This is the law of the *metzora* – on the day” (daylight/publicly), when he publicly and openly repents. And if you might question this publicity, because he might become haughty from the public display – he first goes to the *Kohen*, in whose presence he will be relieved of any traces of ulterior motives.

In his *Aznaim La’Torah*, *Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl*, asks how we reconcile the *metzora* going to the *Kohen* with, *V’yatza ha’Kohen michutz la’machaneh*, “And the *Kohen* shall go outside of the camp.” If we bring the *metzora* to the *Kohen*, why does the *Kohen* have to go out of the camp (so to speak to “greet” him)? The *Lutsker Rav* explains that the *metzora* cannot come into the camp, due to the fact that he is still in a state of *tumah*, ritual impurity. Until the *Kohen* views the plague and renders it pure, the *metzora’s tumah*, impurity, remains in full force. The Torah teaches us an important *chiddush*, novel idea. The *Kohen* goes to a designated place located outside of the camp. The *metzora*, however, comes first and waits until the *Kohen* arrives.

This procedure is executed in this manner, because *tzaraas* (for the most part) is brought upon a person due to *gasus ha’ruach*, vulgarity, pompousness. (These coarse qualities lead to *lashon hora*.) If the *Kohen* were to arrive first, the *metzora* might, in his pompous mind, conjecture that the *Kohen* must wait for “him.” He is the greater of the two. Instead, the *metzora* goes and waits for the *Kohen*. This should diminish his arrogance. The *metzora* is brought to the *Kohen*, but he waits in the designated place for the arrival of the *tzaddik* who will purify him.

One observation: It is eye-opening how self-centered an individual can be. The *metzora* is *tamei*, having ritually contaminated himself with his vulgar attitude and slanderous tongue. Now, after the period of quarantine and its accompanying embarrassment, the *metzora* is still plagued by his overbearing ego, to the point that if the *Kohen* would arrive before him, he (the *metzora*) might delude himself into thinking that the *Kohen* is waiting for “him”! This is the meaning of *gasus ha’ruach*. Even when all the cards are stacked against him, and he has suffered humiliation, his ego does not deflate. The same ego which is the foundation upon which one’s self-esteem is built can simultaneously be the most self-destructive quality which can catalyze his downfall.

Why does the *Kohen* have such power? How does his mere presence, the face to face between the *metzora* and the *Kohen* transform the *metzora’s* arrogance into sheepish submission? A similar instance is found in *Megillas Esther*, which relates the inability of Haman *ha’rasha* to tolerate the existence of *Mordechai ha’tzaddik*, to the point of obsession. *V’chol zeh einenu shove li*; “Yet all this means nothing to me” (*Megillas Esther* 5:13) (as long as I see *Mordechai*, etc.). What was it about *Mordechai* that extinguished Haman’s arrogance? What undermined this evil man’s power, rendering it worthless? I heard an insightful explanation. *Mordechai* represents *emes*, absolute, pristine truth. Living a life guided fully by Torah imbues one with an unabashed intolerance for *sheker*, falsehood. Likewise, falsehood cannot function in the presence of *emes*. Haman personified falsehood. *Mordechai* lived *emes*. Thus, Haman simply could not live in *Mordechai’s* presence. Suddenly his life had no meaning, no value. It was all a sham. When he saw *Mordechai*, he began to lose control of himself. Likewise, when the *metzora* stands before the righteous *Kohen*, his preconceived notion of “self” dissipates as he transitions into meek submission. This is the power of truth.

ונתתי נגע צרעת בבית ארץ אחוזכם

And I will place a *tzaraas* affliction upon the house in the land of your possession. (14:34)

Parashas Tazria/Metzora describe the laws of *tzaraas*, a form of spiritual leprosy, that struck a person as a result of deficient, slanderous, maligning speech. Obviously, deficient speech is rooted in a deficient character. *Chazal* teach that prior to *tzaraas* being afflicted on one’s body, Hashem conveys subtle messages, such as plagues appearing on his clothing or on the walls of his home. It is only after the slanderer has chosen to ignore His messages that the plagues appear on his body. It would, thus, make sense that the Torah would teach the laws of *tzaraas* affecting all three locations in one *parsha*, followed by the laws of purification and cure from *tzaraas* in the next. Surprisingly, the laws of *tzaraas* on clothing and the body are in one *parsha*, followed by the details of the purification service in the next *parsha*, with the anomaly being that *tzaraas* of the walls of the home are in the conclusion after the preceding laws of purification. In other words, the laws concerning *tzaraas* of the home stand alone in a separate category, isolated from the other two. What is different about this form of spiritual leprosy? Furthermore, the *halachah* states that the laws of *tzaraas* of the

house apply only in *Eretz Yisrael* – not in the diaspora. If the plague of spiritual leprosy is to serve as a deterrent from speaking *lashon hora*, it should be in effect in the diaspora as well. How are we to reconcile this?

In “Forever His Students” by Rabbi Baruch Leff, a collection of Torah thoughts and commentary by *Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl*, the *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that one question actually answers the other. Leprosy must appear on the individual or on something which belongs to him. A Jew has no real home outside of *Eretz Yisrael*. Our clothes belong to us, as do our bodies (sort of), but we do not truly possess our homes outside of the Holy Land. We live in exile on a temporary basis, hoping for the clarion call that will herald the advent of *Moshiach*. Only that which is truly ours can be afflicted with *tzaraas*. Therefore, the laws of *tzaraas* of the house are distinct, isolated from the rest. Likewise, they are only valid in *Eretz Yisrael*, because that is our true home.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* adds that Hashem’s designation of one’s body, clothing and home as the venue in which the *tzaraas* affliction would appear, was far from arbitrary. The disease could easily have affected our kitchen utensils, dishes, cars, animals, etc. Apparently, a significant relationship exists between slander/gossip/evil speech and leprosy/plagues in general, and the body, the home, the clothing, in particular. As in all punishments, it is *middah k’neged middah*, measure for measure.

Tzaraas on the body invades one’s privacy and compels him to become humiliated in public – an appropriate punishment for one who has invaded his fellow’s private life and has washed his dirty linen in public. What the sinner’s gossip wrought on the life of his victim, he receives in payback. Likewise, clothing grants a person a semblance of dignity and privacy (of course, this is true only if he/she dresses appropriately as befitting a dignified, modest person, not one who declares his/her lack of self-esteem for the world to see). This dignity was violated by the slanderer when he spoke *lashon hora* about his victim. Last, we are plagued on the walls of our home as punishment for our slander, which stripped our victim of the privacy and comfort of his home. In some instances, the victim has been so deeply humiliated that he feels compelled to relocate. Certainly, he no longer feels as safe and relaxed in his home as he once did before. The paranoia that envelops him and follows him wherever he goes does not diminish even in what used to be the safety of his home.

As a result, the slanderer has stripped the dignity and privacy from the true possessions of the victim: his body, his clothing – but not his home in the diaspora, because it is not his true possession. Under such circumstances the consequence, i.e. leprosy, does not fit the sin. This man’s home is not “his” home. Thus, *middah k’neged middah* does not apply. He will, nonetheless, receive his due punishment, but it will not be visible on his home’s walls.

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Weekly Halacha Parshas metzora

Chametz: Search And Destroy

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Question: Should ten pieces of chametz be hidden throughout the house before the search for chametz takes place?

Discussion: The poskim differ in their views regarding this practice. There are four basic approaches:

1.The Rama[1] states that the custom is to hide pieces of chametz around the house before the search takes place. Since it often happens that no chametz is found during the course of the search, the blessing over the bedikah could possibly be a berachah l'vatalah. To avoid this eventuality, one would be required to hide some chametz before the search begins.

2.Although l'chatchilah pieces of chametz should be hidden, the Rama himself holds that if they were not, the blessing would nonetheless be valid, for the mitzvah is to search for chametz, even in the event that one does not find any.

3.Many poskim[2] hold that one need not be concerned about a berachah l'vatalah at all and one need not hide any chametz before the search.

4.Some poskim[3] hold that the practice of hiding chametz should be abandoned. They are concerned that some pieces may be lost or overlooked, with the result that chametz will remain in the house over Pesach.

The Mishnah Berurah agrees with the poskim who are not concerned about the possibility of a berachah l'vatalah. He nevertheless states that it is not proper to discontinue a long-standing Jewish custom[4]. Indeed, the majority of homes today observe this time-honored practice[5].

Nowadays, there is an additional reason for maintaining this custom. The halachah demands that the home be thoroughly searched during bedikas chametz. Any place into which chametz may have been brought during the year must be checked. In many homes, unfortunately, the search has become merely ritualistic, taking but a few minutes with no serious search conducted. One reason why the bedikah has become perfunctory is that today, homes are thoroughly cleaned and scrubbed for days or even weeks before the search takes place. Consequently, most people assume that no chametz will be found and are satisfied with going through the motions. Although there is a possible justification (limud zechus) for people who conduct such a perfunctory bedikah[6], many other poskim do not agree with this leniency and require that a proper bedikah be conducted.

In order to satisfy the views of all poskim, it is recommended that one hide chametz around the house before the bedikah. Since the searcher is aware that there definitely is some chametz to be found, he will necessarily have to conduct a proper bedikah. Therefore:

Unless one has a custom to the contrary, ten[8] pieces of bread should be hidden in various places around the house before the bedikah begins.

Care must be taken that the pieces are wrapped well so that no crumbs will escape. Only hard pieces should be used. The exact location of the pieces should be recorded and carefully checked. Upon concluding the search the pieces must be properly discarded[9].

Each piece should be smaller than 1 fl. oz.[10]

The custom has become that the pieces are hidden by household members who are not going to be searching the house[11]. However, the searcher himself may also hide the pieces[12].

Some poskim[13] rule that a person who is leaving home for Pesach and therefore conducts his bedikah in advance of the 14th of Nissan without a blessing[14], need not hide pieces of chametz.

Question: Must one actually burn the remnants of his chametz on erev Pesach, or can one get rid of the chametz in another way?

Discussion: There are two views in the Mishnah[15] concerning the proper procedure for fulfilling the mitzvah of tashbisu, the Biblical command to destroy all chametz before Pesach. The basic halachah is that tashbisu is accomplished by getting rid of chametz in any of the following ways: burning it; crumbling it and throwing it to the winds; crumbling it and throwing it into an ocean or river; flushing it down the toilet[16]. L'chatchilah, though, it has become customary to follow the view of Rav Yehudah who holds that burning in fire is the only valid method for getting rid of chametz (beir chametz[17]). In addition to the halachic consideration, kabbalistic and chasidic literature teach that there is a special significance to actually burning the chametz, as burning symbolizes the destruction of the evil inclination and the power of tumah[18].

There is a debate among the latter poskim[19] as to whether the mitzvah of beir chametz applies if one does not happen to own any chametz. There are poskim who contend that one who does not possess any chametz should buy some so that he can fulfill the mitzvah of beir chametz. While many authorities do not agree with this stringency, all agree that it is proper to leave (and not sell to a non-Jew) at least a k'zayis (about 1 oz.) of chametz in order to properly fulfill the mitzvah of beir chametz[20]. Since, as mentioned earlier, the proper way to fulfill the mitzvah of tashbisu is by burning the chametz, we shall review the relevant halachos:

Question: How is the chametz burned?

Discussion: The proper time to burn the chametz is during the fifth hour[21] of the day of erev Pesach[22]. The chametz must be completely burned—to the degree that even a dog would not be able to eat it[23] — by the time the fifth hour ends. [Chametz which has turned into charcoal is sufficiently burned[24].] A loaf of bread or a chunk of cake should be thinly sliced so that the fire will be able to consume it totally[25].

Several contemporary poskim[26] mention that it is not advisable to pour gasoline or other combustible materials over the chametz before burning it, for then the chametz becomes inedible—"destroyed"—by the gasoline, etc., rather than by the fire, and as mentioned before, this should be avoided. Note, however, that if the end of the fifth hour

arrives and the chametz is not yet burned, gasoline etc. should quickly be poured over the remaining chametz so that it becomes inedible.

One should recite the daytime kol chamira, which nullifies the chametz, after the burning of the chametz but before the sixth hour of the day begins[28].

One who forgot or neglected to recite the proper blessing the night before during the search for chametz may recite the blessing at the time of the burning[29].

Customs and hiddurim of burning chametz

There is a custom to burn other "mitzvah" items along with the chametz, e.g., the ten pieces of chametz that were hidden for the bedikah[30], the wooden spoon used for the bedikah[31], hoshanos[32], lulav[33], leftover oil and wicks from the Chanukah candles; fingernails (which, according to halachah, should be burned[34]).

The chametz should be thrown into the fire with one's right hand[35].

There is a view that holds that the fire must be started with wood[36], not gas, coal or paper.

It is preferable to burn the chametz in one's own yard or at least in one's own vessel[37]. It is also preferable for one to burn his own chametz and not to appoint someone else to do it for him[38].

When burning is not an option

If one has a great deal of chametz left before Pesach and finds it impractical to burn it all, he should not just deposit it in the garbage. The garbage is liable to remain on his property (in his garage, on his tree-lawn, etc.) after the time for beir chametz[39], and this could result in the violation of a Biblical prohibition[40]. Even moving the garbage into the street does not solve the problem, since technically the chametz which is in the garbage can or bag is still "his property[41]." Contemporary poskim offer several possible solutions:

Before the deadline arrives, pour a chemical substance over the chametz which will render it completely inedible[42].

Leave the garbage can on the street and renounce possession of it (by declaring it hefker in the presence of three adult males). The can may still be used on Pesach[43].

Include the garbage can and its chametz contents with the items being sold to a non-Jew[44] (mechiras chametz). In this case, the garbage can may not be used on Pesach[45].

Chametz reminders

Many people get rid of all of their actual chametz and assume that they have nothing to sell to a non-Jew. Even so, it is a good idea for them to sell their chametz because it is possible that they possess chametz without realizing it—in deodorants, shaving lotions, or colognes which may be chametz if they contain denatured ethyl alcohol.

Parents who have children in yeshivos or seminaries must remember to specifically include their children's chametz when selling or nullifying their own chametz.

One who owns shares of stock in a chametz food company (or in a conglomerate which owns such a company) should sell those shares to a non-Jew together with the rest of his chametz[46]. Such stocks should not be bought or sold during Chol ha-Moed.

1. O.C. 432:2. 2. *Gra, Chayei Adam and Chok Yaakov quoting the Ra'avad*. 3. *Taz*, quoted by *Sha'ar ha-Tziyun* 432:11. 4. *There are also additional reasons, especially according to Kabbalah, for this ancient custom*. 5. *Chok Yaakov, Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch and Aruch ha-Shulchan all note this custom*. 6. *See Sha'arei Teshuvah, O.C. 433:11 (also quoted by Kaf ha-Chayim) who says that the masses do not conduct a thorough check since they rely on the cleaning process done before the bedikah. In his view, this may be relied upon even if a professional non-Jew did the cleaning. See Chochmas Shelomo (433:11) and Da'as Torah (433:2) for similar rulings*. 7. *Ruling of Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Seder ha-Aruch, vol. 3, pg. 27-28). See also Chok Yaakov 232:14 and Machazik Berachah 232 who advance a similar idea*. 8. *This is the custom, based on the Arizal, quoted by the Mishnah Berurah*. 9. *Mishnah Berurah 232:13-14*. 10. *Sha'arei Teshuvah 432:7. Together, though, all the pieces should total at least one ounce; see Orchos Rabbeinu, Pesach 5 quoting Rav Y.Y. Kanievsky*. 11. *See Chok Yaakov 232:14*. 12. *Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Seder ha-Aruch, vol. 3, pg. 27-28). This was the also the custom of Rav Y.Y. Kanievsky (Orchos Rabbeinu, Pesach 5) and the Satmar Rebbe (Hagadah Divrei Yoel 108)*. 13. *Minchas Yitzchak 8:35. See Kinyan Torah 2:82 and Koveitz Teshuvos 3:73 who disagree*. 14. *As ruled in O.C. 436:1*. 15. *Pesachim 21a*. 16. *Mishnah Berurah 445:5. Although Chazon Ish (O.C. 118:3) hesitates, he, too,*

would agree that flushing it down a modern toilet is similar to throwing it into the ocean (Kinyan Torah 2:86). 17. *Rama, O.C. 445:1. If chametz is found after the sixth hour of erev Pesach [or during Pesach itself] all agree that burning is the proper method; see Mishnah Berurah 445:6 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 17*. 18. *See Kaf ha-Chayim 445:11*. 19. *See the various views in Minchas Chinuch 9; Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 436:21; Mekor Chayim 431; Chelkas Yo'av, O.C. 20; Maharash Engel 8:196; Divrei Chayim 1:9; Avnei Nezer, O.C. 318*. 20. *Mishnah Berurah 445:10 quoting several poskim. See also Kaf ha-Chayim 445:18*. 21. *A halachic "hour" is one twelfth of the day. A day (for this purpose) is from 72 minutes before sunrise till 50 minutes after sunset*. 22. *A minority view advises not to burn chametz earlier than the fifth hour (see Hagadah Moadim u'Zemanim), and indeed, that is the custom observed by many people. But surely if it is difficult or troublesome to wait till that time, the burning may certainly be done any time on the morning of erev Pesach. Preferably, the beir should not be done at night, see Rama 445:1*. 23. *O.C. 442:2*. 24. *Mishnah Berurah 445:1*. 25. *Chazon Ovadyah, pg. 40*. 26. *Hagadah Moadim u'Zemanim; Be'er Moshe 5:122; Siddur Pesach K'hilchaso, pg. 173*. 27. *Rama 434:2, otherwise the burning will be done on chametz which is not his and the mitzvah will not be properly fulfilled*. 28. *Mishnah Berurah 432:12*. 29. *Mishnah Berurah 423:4*. 30. *Arizal (quoted in Kaf ha-Chayim 432:1)*. 31. *Chok l'Yisrael, pg. 38. See Rama 445:3*. 32. *Mishnah Berurah 445:7*. 33. *Kaf ha-Chayim 445:16*. 34. *Custom of the Chazon Ish (quoted in Orchos Rabbeinu, pg. 104)*. 35. *Orchos Chayim 451:1*. 36. *Rashash (Shabbos 66a) quoted in Minchas Yitzchak 2:53 (who rules that one need not be particular about this); Chok l'Yisrael, pg. 40*. 37. *Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:192, based on the view of the Ramban who holds that the Biblical mitzvah of burning chametz applies only to chametz which is in one's own domain. Rav Y. Y. Kanievsky (quoted in Hagadah Arzei ha-Levanon, pg. 23) holds that this is unnecessary*. 38. *Kinyan Torah 5:37. See Mishnah Berurah 232:8 and 234:15*. 39. *Unless it was prearranged that the municipality will collect the garbage before the deadline arrives*. 40. *Several poskim hold that this is only a problem if there are large, clean pieces of chametz in the garbage cans; crumbs or soiled pieces of chametz are not a real problem, especially once they have been thrown into the garbage; see Mishnah Berurah 442:33; Minchas Yitzchak 4:56; Kinyan Torah 2:87; 7:36*. 41. *If the cans belong to the city (outside of Israel) then there is no problem, Minchas Yitzchak 4:56*. 42. *Minchas Yitzchak 4:56; Shevet ha-Levi 1:137*. 43. *Chelkas Yaakov 3:165*. 44. *Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 2:211, quoting Rav Y.Y. Kanievsky*. 45. *Be'er Moshe 1:41; 3:74*. 46. *Minchas Yitzchak 3:1; Moadim u'Zemanim 3:269. Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com Weekly-Halacha, Text Copyright © 5759 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Torah.org. Weekly Halacha © 2018 by Torah.org.*

Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

How to do your Pesach Cleaning Cheerfully in Less than One Day
Going away for Pesach

If you are going away for Pesach and will not be at home during the entire holiday, you can be lenient and not clean for Pesach. You should sell all of the Chametz (leaven) in the house, including all of the crumbs -- but not just the crumbs on their own, because that would have no halachic value. It is possible, however, to sell the food in the cabinets and closets including the "Chametz dirt." If someone is staying in your house, you need to clean the rooms which will be used. The remaining unused rooms must be closed off with tape, and you must sell any Chametz that is in them.

There is still the question of how to fulfill the Mitzvah of Bedikat Chametz (the search for leaven). If you arrive at your Pesach destination by the fourteenth of Nisan, perform the search there. If you arrive on the morning of the fourteenth, you should clean well and check a small room, i.e. the entrance way and not sell the Chametz in that room. You must also perform the search for Chametz, with a blessing, in the rooms in which you will live during Pesach - if no one else has done so.

Chametz smaller than a "Kezayit" (the volume of an olive)

Chametz which is less than a "Kezayit" may obviously not be eaten, but it is not included in the Torah prohibition of "Bal Yeira'eh" and "Bal Yimatze" (Chametz may not be seen or found on Pesach - Shemot 12:19, 13:7) (Responsa Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 1:145). Regarding the Mishnah Berurah's statement (Sha'ar Ha-Tziyun 451:6) that Chametz which can be seen is included in the prohibition of "Chametz She-Avar Alav Ha-Pesach" (using Chametz that has spent Pesach in a Jew's possession) -- the fact is that if it was included in the sale of Chametz, there is no problem (see Mishnah Berurah 142:33 and Chazon Ish, Orach Chaim 117:15). A "Kezayit" is 27 cubic centimeters - 3 centimeter square or a little over a square inch. Usually, only rooms in which children are allowed to bring sandwiches or cookies are likely to contain such big pieces of Chametz. A room in which people do not walk around with food does not need to be cleaned at all. Incidentally, you must take care not to hide pieces of Chametz which are larger

than a "Kezayit" before "Bedikat Chametz," in case one of the pieces should get lost. That way, you do not find them, you will not need to bother much to hunt for them, and you can rely on the "Bittul Chametz" (declaring Chametz ownerless) that you do after the search (Responso Yechaveh Da'at 5:149).

Bedikat Chametz

Start "Bedikat Chametz" in a place where Chametz was used, so the blessing will apply to it. Only search for Chametz in places in which there is a reasonable chance of finding it. It is nearly impossible for Chametz which is a square inch to be hidden inside a book! If there is a chance that the book has Chametz in it, then it must be thoroughly checked. Most books, however, do not need to be cleaned or checked. Cleaning and checking a sample is sufficient. It is customary not to place books that have not been checked for Chametz on the table during Pesach. Everybody knows their kids' habits. Peek, and open here and there. Regarding crumbs in the corners of the house: 1. They are not a "Kezayit." 2. They are inedible to a dog. If there is bread behind a cabinet in an unreachable place, nobody will get to it on Pesach and it is as if it is buried -- just as you do not have to search under stones or under the house's foundations, since nobody will take Chametz from there.

Educating Children

If you want to do a spring cleaning, this is certainly possible, but not before Pesach -- this is not the appropriate time. Pesach vacation is for taking trips, playing with the kids, being happy, dancing and preparing stories for the Seder. A woman works hard all year long: "They enslaved the Jewish women with back-breaking work" (play on Shemot 1:13). If the husband is on vacation too, this may be a good time to leave him with the kids, and give the wife a vacation! That is what vacation is for -- not for working like a donkey and scraping floors.. You can take trips, enjoy yourself, and arrive at the Seder rested in order to make a beautiful Seder and inspire the children. If a woman wants to work like a donkey, and be a kind of slave, she is permitted to do so, but it is not good educationally. She should be free in order to play with the kids. We left the slavery of Egypt, and it was not to enter into our own slavery! We do not have anything against house cleaning, but you should spread it out over the course of the year -- each few months clean another room. This is not the time for projects of cleaning and arranging. In any event, when the Seder arrives there will still be disorder and cleaning that has not been completed.

If a woman is happy with suffering, she is allowed and it subtracts from the suffering of "Gehinom": Any suffering in this world is deducted from the suffering of "Gehinom." If someone desires, this it is legitimate, but not before Pesach. The month of Nissan is a happy month.

Husband's Help

Question: Does a husband have to help his wife?

Answer: A husband does not have to help his wife nor does a wife have to help her husband. Rather, the two of them have to clean together since this is a shared home, and theirs is a shared life as well.

Children's Clothes

There may be cookies in your kids' pockets. Even the crumbs must be removed, since a child may put his hand into his pocket and then into his mouth. You only have to check the clothes you will be wearing that season. It is unnecessary to check any clothes that are put away and will not be worn now, such as winter clothes.

Question: Is it possible to simply wash them in a washing machine?

Answer: Running the clothes through a washing machine will not necessarily get rid of all of the crumbs. The clothes must be checked..

Toys

Toys must also be checked. However, you may put some or all of the toys away, and buy new toys as a present for the holiday! This serves a double purpose of saving work and making the children happy.

Bathroom Cabinets

These may contain Chametz, such as wheat germ oil and alcohol derived from wheat. What a waste to clean it. Close and tape the cabinets and include it in the sale of Chametz.

Couches

You have to check between the pillows. It is an interesting experience to find lost objects.

Books

There is no need to clean them, just do not put them on the table on which you eat. The custom is not to check books for the crumbs that remain in them, but to rely of the nullification (Haggadah Chazon Ovadiah of Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef, p. 21). Clean the books which you will want to read at the table on Pesach, or clean a few books for Pesach.

Dining Room

You do not have to clean everything, just the place where people eat, i.e. the chairs and the table.

Chairs: If the chairs are clean, there is no need to clean them. If the kids throw cereal or other things on them and they do not look clean, clean them with a wet rag.

Table: There are two options: 1. Kashering with boiling water. 2. Covering with several layers of plastic and cloth tablecloths.

High Chair

If it is plastic, it may be immersed in a tub with boiling water and cleaning agents. Clean the cracks with a stiff brush. It is unnecessary to take the chair apart, because whatever is in the cracks and holes is inedible to a dog.

Kitchen

This room must be thoroughly cleaned and not one crumb of Chametz left. A crumb is not nullified even in a thousand times its volume.

Dishwasher

It is preferable not to Kasher a dishwasher. You can do the dishes by hand as in previous generations. It is also possible to use disposable dishes.

Question: Is it at all possible to clean a dishwasher?

Answer: It is possible, but it is a lot of work; there are a lot of rubber parts and connections.

Oven

If you do not have a self-cleaning oven, it is best not to Kasher it. Seal the oven and buy baked goods or buy a "wonder-pot" which allows you to bake on a stove.

Stove

Grates: Clean and cover the grates with as much aluminum foil as possible. Use aluminum foil that is thick enough not to tear, but thin enough to bend and shape. What a waste of time and effort! The best thing is to use special Pesach burners.

Burners: There is no need to clean them; they get burned up in the course of use.

Bottom Pan (where everything falls): In general, if some food falls into it, we do not pick it up, and it is considered "treif;" nevertheless, put aluminum foil on it.

Knobs: Wipe them clean..

Refrigerator

Clean it, but it does not have to be a lot of work. Of course, defrost the freezer (if you have an older model which does not defrost automatically) and clean it. It is best to eat up all Chametz before Pesach, but if expensive Chametz food products are left over, i.e. frozen foods, they may be wrapped up well, labeled "Chametz," stored in the back of the freezer/refrigerator and included in the list of Chametz sold before Pesach..

If you have an old refrigerator with cracks or crevices in the door which is difficult to clean, do not use its inner shelves, but cover them with plastic. Similarly, you must clean the door's rubber part well. If it is old, sometimes it is easier to replace it.

Food Pantry

Do not clean. It is a waste of time. Seal, put sign or sticker not to use and include it in sale of Chametz.

Cabinets of dishes, utensils, pots and pans

Dishes, shelves, and drawers that will not be used on Pesach may be sealed, and need not be cleaned. There are those who are strict to clean even the things which are used for Chametz, but one can be lenient on account of three reasons, each of which would be enough:

1. We sell all the crumbs together with the sale of Chametz.
2. The dishes are clean -- nobody puts a dirty dish away in the cabinet.
3. Even if there is "Chametz dirt," it is definitely less than a "Kezayit."

By the way, sometimes it is easier to paint than to clean. You can paint the corner of the kitchen where food flies using a water-based paint and the gas grates using aluminum paint.

Microwave

It can be Kasher'd by not using it for twenty-four hours, cleaning it for five minutes and boiling water in it for half an hour. All food cooked or baked in it on Pesach should be placed in a covered utensil.

Counters

It is possible to cover them with thick aluminum foil, and then there is no need to Kasher them at all; just wipe them with a rag. Sometimes it is complicated to cover, and then one can Kasher it. Where there are holes, pour floor bleach in them and then pour water from an electric kettle which is still boiling. It is good for two people to do this: One to pour and the other to unplug.

Sink

Regarding the kitchen sink, there are a few solutions:

1. Do not put anything into the sink on Pesach, and wash the dishes in the air. This, however, is unrealistic.
2. Put a plastic bin inside. Just make sure there is still a direct flow down the drain.
3. Thoroughly clean and Kasher the sink like the counters.

Toaster

It is impossible to clean a toaster, but there is no need. Put it in the cabinet of sold Chametz.

Mixer

You have to do "Hagalah" (Kashering by dropping into boiling water) for the bowl and blades. As for the body of the mixer, wrap it in plastic -- making sure not to block the air holes. The best thing is to buy a cheap hand-mixer for Pesach.

Kashering dishes

This is a tremendous amount of work. It is preferable to buy new dishes. True, it is expensive, so buy a few things each year. As for pots, it is possible to buy cheap aluminum ones which are okay for just seven days. There are cheap plastic plates as well as cheap cutlery.

Car

You have to clean it. Take out the mats and gather the "Chametz dirt" – there is no need for a vacuum cleaner -- and clean the compartments and containers. There is no need to pour water or dismantle the seats. In general, there is no need to dismantle anything with screws. Any way you look at it -- if the Chametz is accessible, you can take it out without a screwdriver, and if it is not accessible, it will not come out on Pesach either.

Chumrot - Being Strict

If you know that you are being stricter than Halachah requires, and you choose to be strict, you deserve a blessing. And if you accepted a stricture on yourself and now you want to stop, the way to do that is to do "Hatarah" (getting the vow annulled). But if you thought that a particular act was the actual Halachah, and now you realize it is a stricture, you do not need a "Hatarah." If you have a strong desire to clean a lot, you deserve a blessing, especially for Pesach, "whoever is strict deserves a blessing." You should not, however, force a stricture on yourself, but accept it with love.

Summary

In light of what is written above, it should take about an hour for the dining room, two-three hours to Kasher the kitchen, and another hour to clean the rest of the house. In short, about one day!

All the rest of the cleaning jobs are either strictures or just made up. When we work hard, we use up our energy and get mad at the kids. You have to educate the kids -- but not to educate them to be aggravated: "I told you not to go into this room anymore! Why did you go in?! Eat on the porch! Eat standing up! Don't touch!" The whole kitchen looks like it was overturned by vandals; the husband and kids are trembling in fear in some corner and eating; the mother looks at them like a drill sergeant; there's anger between husband and wife. This is preparation for Pesach?! This is educating the kids? This is definitely not setting a positive example! Our memories of Pesach should not be of a reign of terror.

If you clean together with the kids, that is great, but it must be a happy adventure. First of all, you have to clean what you must – taking half a day – and after that if you want to do other things, you can clean with happiness and joy. Clean, sing, pour water and "you will clean with joy from the wellsprings of salvation" (based on Yeshayahu 12:3).

The Rama rules in the Shulchan Aruch: "Every person should sweep his room before Bedikat Chametz, and check his pockets for Chametz, and the pockets or cuffs where you sometimes put Chametz also need to be checked" (Orach Chaim 433:11) The Mishnah Berurah (#46) adds: "It is the custom to sweep the whole house on thirteenth of Nisan, so that it will be ready to check immediately after nightfall on the fourteenth." This custom is enough. Beyond that, "whoever is strict deserves a blessing" -- as far as Pesach goes, but not as far as the kids go.

It is understood that I am not forcing my opinion on anyone. I am simply stating my humble opinion with explanations. Whoever accepts the explanations will listen and whoever does not accept them will not. I heard most of the practical suggestions about how to shorten the cleaning from women themselves. It is possible that a woman has a strong desire not to shorten this work, and just the opposite, she finds joy in it. That is okay. Even she will benefit from all of the above, because she will not feel pressured that she might violate the Halachah, but rather she will clean with satisfaction and tranquility.

The essential point is the distinction between Chametz, which there is an obligation to clean with all the severity of the Halachah, and dirt – which should obviously be removed, but not necessarily before Pesach. You can spread out the work of removing dirt over the whole year, so that we and our families do not suffer before Pesach. I am not advocating poor housekeeping. We should stand before Chametz with awe and fear, but not all dirt is Chametz. Do not treat Chametz cavalierly, G-d forbid, but at the same time, not everything that is accepted as Pesach cleaning is directed at Chametz.

Have a kosher and happy Pesach. We should ensure that we have a HAPPY Pesach and a KOSHER Purim (!). We should arrive at the Seder night neither tired nor aching but happy, so that this night will be a powerful experience for the kids, and a great source of faith in Hashem, the Redeemer of Israel.

What Is the Brocha?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

On Pesach, shaylos always come up regarding which brachos we should recite before eating matzoh brei, matzoh meal cakes and similar foods. The truth is that similar questions revolve around which brachos we should recite on foods such as French toast, English muffins, kishka and kneidlach.

Question: When I eat matzoh brei, I have been making the brachos of mezonos and al hamichyah on it. Now someone told me that I should wash and make hamotzi on some bread or matzoh instead. Is this true?

Question: The chef in our yeshiva stuffs the meatloaf with huge pieces of leftover challah. Do we need to wash netilas yadayim and make hamotzi before eating it?

Question: I have been told that the brocha on licorice is shehakol, even though the first ingredient listed on its label is flour. Why is this?

In the article Pizza, Pretzels and Pastry on the website RabbiKaganoff.com, we discuss the unusual halachic category called pas haba'ah bekisnin, and found that crackers, pretzels, and certain pastry-type items require the brocha of mezonos before eating them and al hamichyah afterward, unless they are eaten as a meal, in which case they require netilas yadayim, hamotzi, and benschng. (Please refer to that article for details of this complicated halacha.) However, there are numerous other foods prepared with flour that are not typical bread. In order to explore which brocha one recites on these foods, we will start our discussion with items made from bread that is then cooked or fried.

FRENCH TOAST

Although the words "French toast" were unknown in the times of Chazal, the Gemara (Brachos 37b) discusses which brocha to recite on chavitzta, a dish that contains cooked pieces of bread. The Gemara rules that if the pieces are the size of a kezayis (the volume of an olive – for our purposes, we will assume this to be about one fluid ounce), the brocha before is hamotzi and it requires benschng afterward. This is because a large piece of bread does not lose its significance even if it is cooked or fried. However, if all of the pieces are smaller than a kezayis, the brocha is mezonos before and al hamichyah afterward. If some of the pieces are larger than a kezayis and others smaller, then one recites hamotzi as long as one piece is at least the size of a kezayis (Mishnah Berurah 168:53).

Based on this Gemara, we conclude that one must wash netilas yadayim and recite hamotzi before eating French toast, and bensch afterward, since the pieces are at least a kezayis (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 168:10).

WHICH BROCHA DOES ONE MAKE ON KNEIDLACH?

Kneidlach are made from ground matzoh that is mixed to form a new dough and then cooked. Most poskim rule that since the matzoh is ground into small pieces before it is cooked, the brochabrachos are mezonos and al hamichyah even if one eats a very large amount. Another opinion contends that if the pieces of matzoh meal are shaped into balls larger than a kezayis before they are cooked, their brocha is hamotzi (Magen Avraham 168:28). The accepted psak is to make a mezonos and al hamichyah on kneidlach (Mishnah Berurah 168:59).

This leads us to an unusual shaylah I was once asked:

YESHIVA MEATLOAF DELUXE

A yeshiva bachur once asked me whether one should make hamotzi on the meatloaf served at his yeshiva. I thought he was attempting to draw attention to the quality of the cuisine, but indeed, he was asking a serious shaylah. It turned out that the cook in his yeshiva would stuff large pieces of leftover challah into the meatloaf.

This is an unusual situation. Many people include matzoh meal or bread crumbs in their meatloaf, but these lose their importance in the finished product. However, Yeshiva Meatloaf Deluxe included pieces of challah far larger than a kezayis. As we mentioned above, pieces of bread this size do not lose their status as bread. Thus, as strange as it might seem, one is required to wash al netilas yadayim before eating this meatloaf, and its correct brachos are hamotzi before and benschng afterward.

This situation was unusual for an additional reason – people usually soak challah or bread until it falls apart before adding it to a kugel or meatloaf. However, Yeshiva Meatloaf Deluxe calls for bread that is only moistened before being added to the meatloaf, but does not fall apart.

BAKING AND SAUTÉING (frying in a small amount of oil)

On Pesach, my wife makes an item she refers to as "matzoh rolls," which involves mixing matzoh meal together with oil and eggs, forming "rolls" and baking them. Although they are prepared from matzoh meal, the brocha on these items is hamotzi since the dough is subsequently baked rather than cooked and the finished product is very much similar to a type of bread, albeit Pesach-dik.

Similarly, if someone made matzoh rolls by sautéing the dough in a little oil (just enough so that the dough does not burn) the completed product should be treated as bread for all halachos (Mishnah Berurah 168:69). Thus, a matzoh kugel made on the top of the stove would be hamotzi, even if the pieces are smaller than a kezayis.

FRYING VS. COOKING – THE MATZOH BREI SAGA

Thus far, we have learned that one recites hamotzi on large pieces of bread even if they were subsequently cooked or fried, and that small pieces lose their status as bread when they are cooked. However, some poskim contend that frying small pieces of bread does not change their status and they still require netilas yadayim and hamotzi (Magen Avraham 168:39). According to this opinion, matzoh brei requires netilas yadayim, hamotzi and benschng. Other poskim disagree, contending that fried small pieces of bread lose their status as bread just like cooked pieces (see Mishnah Berurah 168:56). These poskim contend that one recites mezonos and al hamichyah on matzoh brei unless at least one of the pieces is the size of a kezayis. The Mishnah Berurah concludes that the halacha is uncertain, and one should avoid this problem by eating these items within a meal. Thus, an Ashkenazi should not eat matzoh brei without washing and making hamotzi on a piece of matzoh first. However, if at least one of the pieces is the size of a kezayis, the matzoh brei requires netilas yadayim, hamotzi and benschng.

Sefardim recite mezonos before matzoh, except on Pesach, unless they eat more than four kebeitzim of matzoh. During Pesach they follow the same rules that I mentioned above for Ashkenazim. During the rest of the year, Sefardim recite mezonos before eating matzoh brei and al hamichyah afterward, and they need not eat it within a meal. However, a Sefardi who ate four kebeitzim of matzoh brei would be faced with the same concern mentioned above and should wash netilas yadayim and make hamotzi on some bread.

According to all opinions, deep frying small pieces of bread or matzoh is the same as cooking, since the oil completely covers the food. Thus, the correct brocha on deep-fried matzoh-meal latkes is mezonos and al hamichyah (Mishnah Berurah 168:59).

CROUTONS

Commercial croutons are produced by either frying or toasting small pieces of seasoned bread. If they are deep fried, then the brocha is mezonos and al hamichyah. If they are fried or toasted, then they are pas haba'ah bekisnin (requiring mezonos when eaten as a snack and hamotzi when eaten as a meal).

Homemade croutons toasted from leftover bread are hamotzi. Deep-fried, they are mezonos, and fried they are subject to the same shaylah mentioned above as to whether they are hamotzi or mezonos, and should therefore be eaten after making hamotzi on bread.

CHALLAH KUGEL

Most people make challah kugel (or matzoh kugel) by soaking the challah or matzoh, then mixing it with other ingredients and baking it. When the challah or matzoh disintegrates into mush before it is mixed with the other ingredients, the resulting kugel has the halachic status of pas haba'ah bekisninbrocha (mezonos when eaten as a snack and hamotzi when eaten as a meal).

Sometimes the challah remains in small pieces; this is often the case when making a matzoh kugel. When this is the case, the resulting kugel must be treated as bread, requiring netilas yadayim and hamotzi, as we pointed out earlier concerning baked goods. Since the halacha here depends on some complicated halachic details, it is better in this case to make hamotzi on a piece of matzoh or bread first.

MATZOH LASAGNA

A guest arrived at someone's house and was served a portion of matzoh lasagna. In this particular recipe, the matzoh was soaked, mixed with meat and other ingredients, and then baked.

I now ask you, dear reader: Must they wash netilas yadayim and which brocha should they recite?

We can answer this question only after ascertaining whether there are noticeable pieces of matzoh in the lasagna. If there are noticeable pieces, even if they are small, the guest should wash netilas yadayim and make hamotzi on matzoh or bread before eating the lasagna kugel. If the matzoh all turned to mush, the lasagna should probably be treated as pas haba'ah bekisnin, and would require borei minei mezonos on a snack size, but would be hamotzi and require bensching if eaten as a meal. The exact definition of a meal for these purposes is discussed in our article on pas haba'ah bekisnin.

PANCAKES, BLINTZES AND CREPES

These items are all made from a batter rather than dough and then baked in a pan, form or griddle. Since they never have a bread-like appearance, they are always mezonos and al hamichyah. This is true even if one eats a large amount, since they are considered neither bread nor pas haba'ah bekisnin. Thus, one can have an entire, very satiating meal of pancakes or blintzes without washing netilas yadayim, and one recites the brocha of al hamichyah afterward.

WAFLES, WAFERS, ICE CREAM CONES

These items are also made from a batter, but in this case the batter is poured into a mold or waffle iron that bakes it into its final shape. Although these items have a slightly more bread-like appearance than pancakes and blintzes, without the mold, these items would never have a bread-like shape, and they do not have a tzuras hapas (bread-like appearance) even after being baked. Therefore, they are not considered pas haba'ah bekisnin but rather regular mezonos. As a result, they do not require netilas yadayim, and the brachos are mezonos and al hamichyah even if one made a full meal out of them. Thus, one can enjoy as many wafers as one wants and recite al hamichyah when finished eating.

ENGLISH MUFFINS

Most English muffins have a consistency noticeably different from regular bread, and therefore are pas haba'ah bekisnin. However, an English muffin whose inside tastes like bread should be treated as bread.

KISHKA AND LICORICE

Although these are two very different foods, the halachic discussion that involves them is similar.

The Gemara (Berachos 37b and 36b) discusses a food called rihata, which was made of flour, oil and honey cooked or stirred together in a pot until they hardened. The Gemara cites a dispute whether the brocha is mezonos, because of the general halachic importance of flour; or shehakol, because the main taste comes from the honey. We rule that the brocha is mezonos because flour is usually considered the main ingredient of a food, unless the flour is there only to hold it together. Whenever the flour is added to provide taste, the brocha is mezonos, even if the main taste comes from the honey.

Kishka has the same halacha as rihata. Although the main taste comes from the other ingredients, the flour certainly adds taste as well.

Although licorice contains a significant amount of flour, the flour is included only to give licorice its shape, and not to add anything to the taste or to make it more filling. Therefore, the brocha on licorice is shehakol (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 208:2 and Mishnah Berurah ad loc.).

According to the Gemara (Bava Kama 30a), someone who desires to become exemplary in his behavior should toil in understanding the laws of brochos. By investing energy into understanding the details of how we praise Hashem, we realize the importance of each aspect of that praise and how we must recognize that everything we have is a gift from Hashem. Furthermore, when reciting the proper brocha, one is acquiring the item from Hashem in the proper way. Pas haba'ah bekisnin functions in two different ways, sometimes as our main sustenance and most of the time as a pleasant snack. Reciting the correct brocha focuses our understanding on the appropriate praise for Hashem at the correct moment.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה