

BS"D



To: Parsha@YahooGroups.com
From: crshulman@aol.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON TAZRIA METZORA - 5764

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From: Don't Forget [sefira@torah.org]

Tonight, the evening of Friday, April 23, will be day 18, which is 2 weeks and 4 days of the omer.

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From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2004 5:48 AM To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Tazria-Metzorah

"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Tazria-Metzorah - The Key To Effective Prayers Is Watching Our Mouths

The Parshios of Tazria and Metzorah deal extensively with the laws of Tzaraas, a disease or condition which comes as punishment for the sin of speaking Lashon Horah (gossip; slander). Three times every day, following the Shmoneh Esrei prayer, we say a prayer that should act in our behalf to help us control our mouths: "G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully." The source of this prayer is a Talmudic listing of various prayers uttered by the Amoraim at the end of their formal prayers [Berachos 16b-17a].

Our prayer announcing the coming of a new month -- "Rosh Chodesh bentching" -- is the prayer quoted in the Gemara from Rav. The prayer quoted there in the name of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi has also been adopted in our morning service, immediately following 'Brochos': "May it be Your will, Hashem, to rescue me today and every day from brazen men and brazenness." Rava's prayer as cited there has been adopted as part of the Yom Kippur liturgy. Mar bar Ravina's prayer is the above-referenced prayer asking for G-d's help to guard our tongue and lips from speaking evil. It concludes with the words "May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, Hashem, my Rock and my Redeemer."



Rav Nissan Alpert notes that this last prayer (May the expressions of my mouth...) is really a generic tag line that could have been added by any of the Amoraim to their prayers. Rav could have said it; Rebbe Yehudah HaNasi could have said it; Rava could have said it. Why is this generic formula only appended to the prayer of Mar bar Ravina?

Rav Alpert explained that this generic request that our prayers be answered is uniquely appended to the prayer of Mar bar Ravina because he provides the key for allowing our prayers to be effective. The essence of the prayer "Guard my lips..." is to make all my other multitude of prayers -- for understanding, health, livelihood, security from enemies, National restoration, etc. -- effective. The key for

our prayers to be accepted is the possession of a tongue and lips that are worthy of being listened to by G-d.

We have a long laundry list of requests for G-d -- three times a day, 365 days a year. But so many times, our prayers seemingly are not effective. Our prayers are not answered (at least as far as we can tell). Why not?

If a person has a radio transmitter that he has just smashed with a sledgehammer, he should not be surprised if he turns it on and it does not work. "Why doesn't it work? Because you broke it!"

Our mouth is a transmitter. We use it to utter our prayers. If everyday, so to speak, we take a sledgehammer and slam our mouths it is obvious why our mouths might not be effective in prayer. It is not that our prayers are not answered -- they might not even be transmitted!

Mar bar Ravina ended his prayer with the request that his prayers be accepted and desired by G-d. But he prefaced that climax to his prayer with good advice as to how to make one's prayers accepted by G-d. The key is having a tongue and lips that are guarded from speaking evil.

It is futile to use a mouth contaminated by gossip and slander to effectively transmit prayers to G-d, even for our sincerest needs.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore dhoffman@torah.org These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 413, Speaking Lashon Horah on Baalei Machlokes. Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. RavFrand, Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org. Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> or email learn@torah.org to get your own free copy of this mailing. Project Genesis - Torah.org is a recognized charity and depends upon your support. Please help us by visiting <http://torah.org/support/> for information on class dedications, memorials, annual giving and more. Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> -- see the links on that page. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email copyrights@torah.org for full information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site <http://www.torah.org/> Project Genesis, Inc. learn@torah.org 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 250 Baltimore, MD 21208

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By RABBI DAVID SILVERBERG

Yom Sheni, 28th day of the first month of the year [3]316

Yom HaShoah, Monday, 28 Nissan 5764 – April 19, 2004

Parshiyot Tazria-Metzora deal entirely with the laws of tum'a and tahara, describing various situations which render a person "ritually impure" and the means by which he can divest himself of that status. Parashat Tazria begins with tum'at yoledet – the tum'a status that comes upon a woman after childbirth – and then proceeds to elaborate in great detail on tum'at tzara'at – the tum'a resulting from tzara'at - various types of skin infections or discoloration of one's walls or garments. The latter part of Parashat Metzora addresses "tum'a ha-yotz'a min ha-guf" – the tum'a caused when various fluids leave the body (menstrual blood, semen, and so on).

Several early Jewish philosophers, most notably Rav Sa'adya Gaon (Emunot Ve-dei'ot, 6:4) and the Rambam (Moreh Nevukhim 3:47), have argued that these laws do not stem from any intrinsic, spiritually contaminating quality associated with these phenomena. In fact, as Rav Sa'adya emphasizes, the bodily fluids that bring on tum'a do so only once they exit the body. Had the Torah viewed them as an inherently contaminating force, why does a person become tamei only once they leave his body? Rav Sa'adya and the Rambam therefore explain (with some variation) that the Torah simply wanted to establish certain periods in a person's life when he is barred from entering the Temple. Unrestricted access to the Mikdash would diminish from a person's sense of awe and reverence towards it, and the Torah therefore required that at

certain times a person must observe a period of tum'a and keep away from the Temple.

By contrast, Rabbi Yehuda Ha-levi, in his Sefer Ha-kuzari (2:60), suggests a famous explanation for why specifically these phenomena bring a status of tum'a upon a person. After emphasizing that we cannot possibly claim to know the full meaning underlying these laws, and expressing great ambivalence at even venturing an approach, Rabbi Yehuda Ha-levi suggests that all forms of tum'a relate, in one form or another, to death. Chazal in several places identify tzara'at as a kind of death, and the bodily discharges that render one tamei all involve the loss of potential life (uterine blood, semen, etc.). The Torah wishes to impress upon us that our religion focuses on life, rather than death. Just as it strictly forbade the pagan practice to consult with spirits and overly concern oneself with death, so did the Torah cast a status of impurity upon those who have, in one way or another, experienced a form of "death." The pagans felt they had to look beyond physical life for spirituality and religious meaning; the Torah emphasizes that we are to find religious meaning and holiness within daily life and the physical human condition.

One obvious question, however, seems to negate this entire approach of Rabbi Yehuda Ha-levi. As we mentioned, Parshat Tazria opens with the halakha of tum'at yoledet – the state of impurity that befalls a woman after childbirth. Is not childbirth the very opposite of death? If tum'a involves forms of quasi "death," how could childbirth possibly be included among those experiences that result in tum'a?

One explanation (suggested by Rav Yuval Shirlo) might be that the law of tum'at yoledet, according to Rabbi Yehuda Ha-levi, reflects the grim reality of the connection between life and death. Inasmuch as all human life results in death, the birth of life in effect gives birth to death, as well. By including childbirth among the phenomena that cause tum'a, the Torah perhaps alludes to this sorrowful reality.

Alternatively, Rabbi Yehuda Ha-levi perhaps never intended to include tum'at yoledet in his general explanation of tum'a. It is likely that this form of tum'a differs from the others in terms of its conceptual basis. The Torah writes that for the first week or two weeks after childbirth, a woman observes a period of tum'a similar to that of a nidda. Given the fact that childbirth is generally accompanied and followed by vaginal bleeding (in fact, according to the accepted halakhic position, even in the unlikely event that no bleeding occurred during birth we nevertheless assume that blood left the body – "ein petichat ha-kever be-lo dam"), the Torah perhaps conferred a nidda status upon the woman simply by virtue of the resemblance between the two phenomena. Though in essence bleeding during childbirth and menstrual bleeding signify two opposite physiological experiences, the superficial similarity between the two perhaps warrants their common result of tum'a.

Secondly, one might suggest an entirely different approach to tum'at yoledet. In our S.A.L.T. series last year, we presented the explanation given by Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch for this category of tum'a. Without repeating our entire discussion, we will simply cite one passage from Rav Hirsch's commentary:

"Above all, the mother herself, under the fresh impression of her physically completely passively and painfully having to submit to the forces of the physical laws of Nature at the most sublime procedure of her earthly calling, has to reestablish again the consciousness of her own spiritual height. And only after this impression of lack of freedom of will has completely passed away has she, by an offering, to undertake to allow herself of her own free will to give herself up to the whole spiritual height of her calling of woman and mother which is now restarting with all its momentous and often painful moments; and to allow herself to reenter the Sanctuary of holy happy faithfulness to duty."

Quite possibly, then, Rabbi Yehuda Ha-levi had never meant to apply his general approach to tum'a to the instance of tum'at yoledet, which has its own underlying reasoning, function and conceptual basis.

From: torahweb@torahweb.org Sent: April 21, 2004 Subject: Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Bringing the Shechina Into Our Homes
<http://www.torahweb.org/thisWeek.html>

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

BRINGING THE SHECHINA INTO OUR HOMES

Parsha Metzora concludes with a final warning to observe the laws of tumah and taharah: "V'hizartem es Bnei Yisroel mitumasam v'lo yamusu b'tumasam b'tam'am es mishkani asher b'socahm" - "you should separate the Jewish people from their impurities so that they should not die by defiling my mishkan which is in their midst" (Vayikra 15:31). The simplest meaning of this passuk refers to the prohibition of entering the Mishkan in the state of tumah. Chazal (Shavuos 18b) saw in this passuk an additional interpretation. This requirement of separating from tumah is the source for the halacha of prisha samuch l'veses -abstaining from marital relations prior to the onset of the status of niddah. Although the woman is not technically a niddah, the halachah requires, as an additional precaution, the couple to separate rather than risk violating the prohibition of niddah. How did Chazal see in this passuk any reference to the halachos of niddah as they pertain to husband and wife? This passuk is discussing the halachos of tumah as they relate to the mishkan. What led Chazal to see in this passuk this additional meaning? When Eliezer returns with Rivkah, Yitzchak puts her through a test. He brings Rivkah to the tent of Sarah to see whether she is the appropriate successor to Sarah. Chazal comment that there were three features that marked the tent of Sarah. There was a cloud hovering over the tent, a unique blessing in the dough and a candle constantly lit. Upon the death of Sarah these three things disappeared. Only when Rivkah entered the tent did they reappear. These three miraculous features of the tent of Sarah and Rivkah are the hallmarks of Jewish women for eternity. The three mitzvos entrusted specifically to women are nidaah, chalah, and hadlokas haNeir. The miraculous blessing in the dough and the constant candle obviously correspond to the mitzvos of chalah and hadlokas haNeir. How does the cloud hovering over the tent of Sarah and Rivkah represent the mitzvah of niddah?

We are familiar with another unique cloud hovering over another special tent: "vayechas he'an'an es ohel moed u'kvod Hashem miley es haMishkan" - "the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of Hashem filled the sanctuary" (Shemos 40:32). The image of a cloud over the tent of Sarah and Rivkah is the foreshadowing of the Divine Presence hovering over the mishkan. A cloud over a tent is always indicative that the shechina is present. What is unique about the observance of hilchos niddah that merits the Divine Presence in the home?

The Torah (Vayikra 5:21) refers to a person who denies receiving an object to watch as a mo-el ba'Hashem - one who is committing a treachery against Hashem. Rashi quotes from Chazal that this individual is singled out as such because of the unique nature of the sin. An object is usually given to watch not in the presence of witnesses. It is understood that the only witness is Hashem. One who sins in private is denying the existence of Hashem as only He is aware of the action. Chazal (Kiddushin 31a) teach us, "amar Rabi Yitschak: kol ha'oveir aveira baseiser k'ilu docheik raglei haShechina" - "one who sins in private is as if he is pushing away the Divine presence." Rashi explains that such an individual is declaring that Hashem doesn't exist in this private area.

If a cheit committed in private is a denial of the existence of the shechina, refraining from a cheit in private is the greatest affirmation of the existence of Hashem. If no human being is aware of one's actions, it is only the sincere belief that Hashem is present that deters one from sin.

The area of halachah that is the ultimate expression of the belief of the shechina being present is taharas haMishpacha. A couple that observes this mitzvah carefully in the most private area of their lives is constantly reaffirming that the shechina is present everywhere. The Jewish home in which taharas haMishpacha is carefully guarded is truly a place worthy of the Divine Presence resting upon it. The cloud of Glory that hovered over the tent of our matriarchs and the cloud that rested over the mishkan both symbolize the presence of Hashem.

When the Torah warns us to be extra careful not to defile the mishkan because Hashem is present there, the Torah is referring not only to the mishkan itself, but also to the laws of taharas haMishpacha. Be extra cautious not to even inadvertently violate these laws because their proper observance assures that the shechina be present in our homes.

May our meticulous observance of taharas haMishpacha continue to make our homes places worthy of the shechina. In the merit of this mitzvah may we see the shechina rest upon the beis haMikdash, b'meheira b'yameinu.



<http://www.koltorah.org/ravj/Hallel%20on%20Yom%20Haatzmaut.htm>

Parshat Tazria-Metzora 1
Iyar 5762 April 13, 2002

HALLEL ON YOM
HAATZMAUT

BY RABBI HOWARD
JACHTER

Introduction In celebration of Yom Haatzmaut of our beloved Medinat Yisrael, we will review the major points of the debate whether one should recite Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut. We will

discuss some of the major Talmudic sources that have been the focus of this debate. Rav Ovadia Yosef's Teshuvot Yabia Omer (Orach Chaim 6:41) is an invaluable resource for both sides of the debate on this issue and serves as the basis for much of this essay.

We should note that there is no definitive position regarding this issue. Refraining from Hallel is not the best option. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 94a) strongly reprimands King Chizkiyahu for failing to recite Hallel upon the miraculous defeat of Sancherev, the king of Assyria. In fact, the Gemara states that Chizkiyahu was a serious candidate to be the Mashiach. He was rejected because of his failure to recite Hallel. On the other hand, reciting Hallel is also not the best option. The Gemara (Shabbat 118b) condemns those who recite Hallel every day. Hallel is reserved for special occasions. The Gemara describes one who does not reserve Hallel for such occasions as a blasphemer. Accordingly, one must take a stand on this issue, either to recite Hallel or not to recite Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut.

Pesachim 117a – The Chanukah Precedent The Gemara (Pesachim 117a) discusses the source of the obligation to recite Hallel. The Gemara cites the Sages who stated, "The prophets instituted the recitation of Hallel at various times of the year and whenever Jews are redeemed from dire straits." Rashi (s.v. Ve'al) adds that Chanukah is an example of reciting Hallel in celebration of redemption from a crisis. The Meiri (Pesachim 117a) writes that if a miracle happens to an individual or to a community of Jews, then that community may establish the day of redemption as a day for reciting Hallel without a Beracha. Only if the miracle occurred to

all Jews, such as Chanukah, may we recite Hallel with a Beracha. We note, though, that the Rambam and Shulchan Aruch do not codify this Gemara. The Magen Avraham (686:4) and Mishna Berura (686:8), however, write that a community is authorized to declare a "Purim" celebration for all generations on a day that a miracle occurred. The Chayei Adam (155:41) recounts at length how he instituted a "Purim" for his family and future descendants for a miracle that occurred to his family.

Poskim debate whether Yom Haatzmaut constitutes a miracle for the entire Jewish community. Some argue that the restoration of the Bait Hamikdash constitutes redemption for the entire Jewish nation, but that restoration of Jewish sovereignty over a portion of Eretz Yisrael redeems only the Jews who reside in Eretz Yisrael. On the other hand, the fact that Eretz Yisrael is a safe haven for persecuted Jews worldwide does constitute redemption for all Jews. The fifth day of Iyar is appropriate to celebrate since it is the day that Jews were redeemed from having no place to go in times of persecution.

An Open Miracle? – Maharatz Chiyut to Shabbat 21b The Maharatz Chiyutz (Shabbat 21b) asserts that we recite Hallel on Chanukah only because a Neis Nigleh (an blatant miracle) occurred on that day. He notes that the Gemara, in explaining why we celebrate Chanukah, mentions the miracle of the oil but does not mention the military victory of the Hasmoneans. Some therefore argue that Hallel is inappropriate for Yom Haatzmaut since no blatant miracle occurred during the establishment of the State of Israel and its War of Independence. While they acknowledge that many subtle miracles occurred, they argue that no obvious miracle occurred such as one day's supply of oil lasting eight days.

One may respond, though, that the Al Hanissim prayer presents the military victory of the Maccabees as the primary reason for celebrating Chanukah. The Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah 3:1-3) writes that we celebrate Chanukah for a variety of reasons. These include not only the miracles of the oil and the military victory, but also that Jewish sovereignty was restored over Eretz Yisrael for more than two hundred years. Moreover, the Gemara (Megila 14a) questions why we do not recite Hallel on Purim. The Gemara presents a variety of answers, but does not offer the absence of an open miracle in the Purim story as an answer. In fact, a characterizing feature of Megilat Esther is that it's miracles of Megilat Esther were subtle. Many believe that the name of Hashem does not appear in the Megila because no blatant miracle occurred. We are able to sense from the progression of events in the Megila that Hashem quietly orchestrated them. Similarly, one who studies the history of the State of Israel with a discerning eye (see Connor Cruise O'Brien's "The Siege") is able to perceive the involvement of the Creator.

Two anecdotes from Israel's War of Independence illustrate this point. A father of a friend of mine recalls that when he was sent to battle he was given only one bullet. His commanding officer instructed him to use it well. Rav Yehuda Amital (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion) recalls that when he enlisted to join the army, he was assigned the rank of an officer. They told him that since he knew how to shoot a gun, he is qualified to serve as an officer. These stories typify the desperate situation that we faced in the War of Independence. We emerged victorious because of Hashem's guiding hand.

Many claim that this constitutes sufficient reason to recite Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut. Rav Amital has stated many times that even if one does not believe it is appropriate to recite Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut, he should find some vehicle for expressing thanks to Hashem for granting us Medinat Yisrael. Rav Yehuda Henkin of Jerusalem suggests using the Ve'hee She'amda section of the Pesach Hagada as an opportunity to thank Hashem for Medinat Yisrael. Medinat Yisrael saves us from our oppressors who arise in every generation. Hashem will also save Medinat Yisrael from it's current oppressors.

Successes and Failures of Medinat Yisrael Many note that although we are grateful to Hashem for giving us Medinat Yisrael, we must acknowledge the shortcomings of Medinat Yisrael. Besides the chronic (and current acute) security problems, there are spiritual shortcomings. Rav Ovadia Hadaya (Teshuvot Yaskil Avdi O.C. 10:7) rules that Hallel should not be recited on Yom Haatzmaut because of the unstable security situation. Instead, he suggests reciting the chapters of Hallel (omitting the Beracha) after the completion of Tefillah. Rav Ovadia Yosef relates that Rav Zvi Pesach Frank did not recite Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut in his Bait Midrash because of the security problems and the spiritual shortcomings of the nation. Moreover, the Chazon Ish (Letters of the Chazon Ish, number 97) writes that it is inappropriate for this generation, with all of its spiritual flaws, to institute new practices. The Chazon Ish wrote this in connection with establishing Yom Hashoah, and his reasoning applies to instituting the recitation of Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut.

Nevertheless, many Gedolim endorse reciting Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut. Rav Meshulem Roth (Teshuvot Kol Mevaser 21) and Teshuvot Neitzer Mataai (number 36) rule that Hallel may be recited with a Beracha, while other Gedolim believe that it should be recited without a Beracha. These Gedolim include Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yabia Omer 6:O.C. 41), Rav Aharon Soloveitchik (Gesher, Yeshiva University, 1969), and Rav Yitzchak Herzog (cited in Teshuvot Yabia Omer 6: O.C. 42).

Rav Ovadia notes that although we are profoundly disappointed at the overall spiritual level in Israel, we should appreciate the incredible growth of Torah study and observance in many sectors of the population. He writes that Israel has become the world Torah center. We add that today almost all very serious Halachic questions are referred to the great Halachic authorities in Israel for adjudication. This constitutes a sea change relative to the situation that existed in America only two decades ago.

Some cite the Halacha (Mishna Berura 219:2) that one recites Birchat Hagomel only upon full recovery from illness and not partial recovery as support for omitting Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut. They claim that the Jewish People have only partially recovered from the illness of the Holocaust and the Exile and thus it is not yet time to recite Hallel for the establishment of the State of Israel. Others respond that the Gemara (Berachot 59b) states that when one hears of his father's death, he should recite two Berachot if there is an inheritance. He recites Dayan Emet upon the death and Shehechyanu upon the joy of the inheritance. Halacha appreciates and addresses complexity and ambivalence. Accordingly, many recite Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut as well as mourn on Tisha B'av. We celebrate the accomplishments of Medinat Yisrael on Yom Haatzmaut and mourn what we lack on Tisha B'av.

Conclusion It is difficult to arrive at a definitive conclusion whether one should recite Hallel with a Beracha on Yom Haatzmaut. Hence, most of those who recite Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut omit the Beracha. The practice of reciting Hallel without a Beracha upon a miracle is mentioned in the Meiri's commentary to Pesachim 117a. Moreover, the practice of reciting Hallel without a Beracha is familiar to Sephardic Jews who follow the opinion of the Rambam (Hilchot Chanukah 3:7) to recite Hallel without a Beracha on Rosh Chodesh and the last six days of Pesach. Far from being a "cop-out," the approach of reciting Hallel without a Beracha is an expression of a sophisticated recognition of both the positive and negative aspects of Medinat Yisrael. We are full of joy that Medinat Yisrael exists, but we are pained by its shortcomings.

From: Howard Jackson [howard.jackson@citigroup.com] Sent: April 21, 2004 Subject: Metzora - from www.DivreiTorah.co.uk
The Seder Metzora
[by HOWARD JACKSON]

"And the Kohen shall order that for the person undergoing purification (from Tzara'at) there be taken two live birds, a piece of cedar, some crimson wool and some hyssop." (VaYikra 14:4).

Let's compare the order in the above verse with the following verse describing the person undergoing purification from coming in contact with a dead body: "And the Kohen shall take a piece of cedar, some hyssop and some crimson wool ..." (BeMidbar 19:6).

Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky explains that the verse in BeMidbar is written in order of decreasing size: the cedar is the largest, next the hyssop and then the crimson wool (whose dye comes from a worm). So, what about our verse in VaYikra?

Rambam famously writes (De'ot 2:2) that the remedy for any bad character trait is to initially conduct oneself in accordance with the opposite extreme and eventually one will return to the middle path. For instance, if a person has a strong tendency to get angry, he should endeavour to behave in an extremely calm manner. After a period of time, he will moderate back to the middle path, knowing when it is appropriate to display anger or extreme calmness.

The Gemara (Arachin 16a) teaches that one of the causes of Tzara'at (a spiritual disease with physical symptoms) was Gasut HaRuach (arrogance). The cedar, a very tall tree and the largest item in the list of ingredients, symbolizes the arrogant person. He needs to move immediately to the opposite extreme, represented by the smallest item in the list, the crimson wool (whose dye comes from a worm). Only then, will the person return to the middle path. Therefore, the order for the person undergoing purification from Tzara'at is a piece of cedar, some crimson wool and some hyssop.

From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: April 21, 2004 To: yhe-sichot@etzion.org.il Subject: SICHOT64 -24: Yom Ha-atzma'ut - Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Student Summaries Of Sichot Of The Roshei Yeshiva
YOM HA-ATZMA'UT
SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A
Please daven for the refuah sheleimah of Elka bat Shoshana.

Yeshivat Har Etzion joins in mourning the sudden death of Mr. Benjamin Strauss father of our talmidim Josh (1999-2001) and Avi (2002-04), of Bergenfield, New Jersey. Our condolences to his wife Claire and to the entire Strauss family. HaMakom Yenachem etkhem be-tokh she'ar avelei Tzion veYerushalayim.

"As If He Had Gone Out Himself:" Integrating Past, Present and Future in Observing Yom Ha-atzma'ut

Adapted by Dov Karoll

Yom Ha-atzma'ut is integrated into the calendrical cycle of the Jewish people and of the State of Israel. Accordingly, our expectations for this day can be seen in comparison with other festivals, relative especially to Pesach, the holiday most connected to the history of the Jewish people. Therefore, we must examine three levels of our observance of festivals, and see how they apply to Yom Ha-atzma'ut.

In one sense, we must observe each festival both in accordance with its nature, and in accordance with our current situation. Clearly, there are specific halachic and philosophical aspects that remain constant. Nonetheless, there is an aspect that relates to the circumstances which serve as the context for the festival. In the Haggada, we proclaim that "In every generation there are those who rise up against us, and G-d saves us from them." Even when one drinks the same four cups, eats the same matzot, and reads the same Haggada, one should relate, at some level, to the salvation and dangers that exist in that specific year, in that generation, in the particular historical context in which one finds oneself. This is one aspect: the contemporary, the existential, celebrating in light of one's current situation.

On the opposite extreme, we do not look at our current situation, but rather at the events of the past, at the beginning of the journey, the roots of the process. We examine the source of the holiday's significance and message. Chazal have taught us through the contents of the Haggada that one must relate to two historical aspects of the holiday. On the one hand, there is the original situation of servitude, suffering,

and hardship, and on the other hand, there followed redemption, salvation and the upliftment. The Mishna (Pesachim 116b) teaches that "In every generation one must see himself as if he has gone out of Egypt." But in order to experience the salvation from Egypt, one must first feel the experience of the servitude and the suffering that our forefathers experienced, to internalize the notion that "Had G-d not taken us out of Egypt, we and our children would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt" (Haggada). One must imagine – and it is not easy – that one is enslaved in Egypt, with the mortar and the bricks. Once one has done that, striking the proper balance between the "matza aspect" and the "maror aspect" of the seder night, having experienced some of the suffering, one can properly appreciate the magnitude of the Divine salvation.

The Rambam's formulation of this law (in his Haggada at the end of Hilkhot Chametz u-matza) sharpens this aspect even more. Unlike the usual version, in which each person must "see himself as if he went out of Egypt," the Rambam writes that each person must "present himself as if he is currently leaving Egypt." One is not to retell an old memory from previous years, but rather re-experience the exodus itself, as if one is currently caught up in the tension and shock of the original experience itself.

I believe there is also a third aspect to our observance of the festivals. The opening verses of Parashat Bechukotai (Vayikra 26:3-13) describe a period that stands in stark contrast to the two aspects of which we just spoke. The crisis the people faced in Egypt, like the period of the birth of the State of Israel, was a tempestuous, dramatic period, characterized by challenges as well as by bravery and courage on the part of the people to overcome those challenges. Our time, like many periods of Jewish history, has been characterized by challenges and threats, and we are constantly called upon to gird our loins to take on the challenges that face us.

The verses at the beginning of Bechukotai, on the other hand, describe a world devoid of all these challenges, a pastoral, peaceful existence. Both the reality described and the description itself are pastoral. This notion appears in several places in the Prophets as the idealization of "Each person under his own vine and under his own fig tree" (Melakhim I 5:5, Mikha 4:4). I ask myself: in the midst of such a prosperous period as described in these verses, how would one observe the holidays? Would one emphasize only the original exodus from Egypt, or would the current tranquility become part of what a person is meant to experience and to feel?

Since the Torah presents this pastoral scene as a reward for "follow[ing] My laws and faithfully observ[ing] My commandments" (26:3), apparently this scenario is desirable. Clearly, this parasha does not speak of spiritual stagnation and desiccation; spiritual growth and vitality are the order of the day in such a situation as well. Rather, the calm is promised with regard to the material aspects of life, relieving the pressure in those areas to allow for greater emphasis on the spiritual. However, this does not tell us that one should relate to the festivals with less dynamism.

Beyond that, it seems to me that this peaceful, pastoral element should remain a component of the festival experience even during more difficult periods. I do not subscribe to the dream of "normalization" that exists in certain schools of Zionist thought. We have no interest in the Jewish people or the State of Israel becoming just like the other nations. We wish to experience that which has characterized the Jewish people throughout its history, namely, growth and creativity despite the crises and difficult times.

The State of Israel came into being amidst the tempestuous reawakening and revitalization of the Jewish people, and this renewed energy has contributed to its continued existence. However, we yearn for stability and want to feel that our existence here is enduring.

The Torah tells us, "For G-d's portion is His people" (Devarim 32:9), and the Ramban emphasizes several times in his commentary on the Torah (Bereishit 17:1, 28:12; Vayikra 18:25; Bemidbar 23:23, Devarim 32:7) that this means we are under G-d's direct supervision. As such, we have no guarantees for ongoing stability if we do not continue to deserve it. Yet we do not strive for precariousness, and we learn from the aforementioned verses that we need not strive for it. Rather, we strive for an element of stability in our existence. Unfortunately, circumstances demand that we constantly fight to maintain this.

This stability and tranquility does not often come to fruition, and is rarely reflected in reality. How many generations experienced "And you shall lie down untroubled by anyone"? Nonetheless, we must not feel that our existence is entirely precarious, but should sense an aspect of permanence and rootedness in our land, in our state, in our daily lives.

The above considerations and feelings should accompany us in all our celebrations of special occasions, but they have special applicability to Yom Ha-atzma'ut, especially in our current situation. On the one hand, we should celebrate Yom Ha-atzma'ut in light of our current situation. On the other hand, we ought to develop a strong experiential connection to our history, along the lines of "In every generation one must see himself as if he has gone out..." In other words, we must grasp the difficulties

and suffering we underwent along the winding road of our two thousand years of Exile, as well as the challenges faced here in Israel before the founding of the State. In light of this recognition, we can then appreciate the magnitude of the salvation both on a national level, and in terms of the personal salvation and revivification of millions of individuals, that came about through the establishment of the State.

But it is not physical salvation alone, the deliverance of those who were in peril, for which we are thankful. To apply the model of the exodus from Egypt, we are not speaking exclusively of the first two "phrases of redemption" from Shemot 6 (verses 6-8), "And I shall set you free..." and "I will deliver you from their bondage." The State also has elements of spiritual salvation and rebuilding, the aspects of redemption epitomized by the latter phrases: "I will redeem you... and I will take you to be My people, and I will be your G-d... And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov."

In order to appreciate the significance of this salvation, we must comprehend what came before. This is especially difficult for those who were born after the founding of the State. It is hard to imagine what would be if there were no State of Israel, but it demands our attention. Another point deserves consideration. The State of Israel is a unique country. However, part of what we desire is that there be stability and rootedness in our existence here. We wish that the arrival of each Yom Ha-atzma'ut not be cause for astonishment. We wish for a certain measure of normality, and the ability to celebrate Yom Ha-atzma'ut with confidence of our endurance. While the celebration of Yom Ha-atzma'ut ought to differ from the celebrations of other nations, but it would be nice to have some parallel, in this regard, to Bastille Day in France and to the Fourth of July in America. And this despite the present reality, which does not seem to allow for such thoughts.

What do our enemies say? "A state may have risen, but what is fifty years in the grand historical picture?" They compare our existence to that of the Crusader state, which lasted a few generations and then was uprooted. The entirety of our Jewish soul, of our Israeli soul, of our Torah soul, rebels against this notion. Even when "You lie down" and you are "troubled by someone," we assert that we are set, rooted, firm, in this land. We will not allow anyone to tell us that we are a relic from the past, or a transient movement in the broad historical picture. Admittedly, viewing Yom Ha-atzma'ut through the perspective of different time periods may be difficult. It is more complex than focusing upon a single scenario. However, I believe that if we wish to appreciate the full significance of the event, both experientially and philosophically, we must take all of this into consideration.

I have spoken about some parallels between Yom Ha-atzma'ut and the holiday of Pesach. Regarding Pesach, Chazal emphasize an additional aspect. The blessing of "Asher ge'alanu," which is pronounced after telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, opens with thanking G-d for redeeming us, and for redeeming our forefathers, from Egypt, and concludes by turning to the future, asking that G-d allow us to celebrate in the redemption. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Berakhot 1:5, as explained by Tosafot, Pesachim 104b, s.v. chutz), in explaining why the blessing contains "barukh" at both its beginning and its end (while according to the rules of blessings we would expect only one in this case), asserts that this is because the blessing speaks of two different redemptions, one past and one future.

This teaches us that our celebration of the Exodus from Egypt is bound up, intrinsically, with our anticipation for the future redemption. Not only are there different time periods to consider, drawn from the past and inherent in the present, but we must also exhibit yearning and desire toward the future. This is part of the anticipation for the redemption; we are a dreaming and yearning people, with a vision of what will be in the future.

This brings us to another point. I spoke about how difficult it may be for those who have merited to grow up in a time when the State of Israel could be taken for granted, to "See himself as if he had gone out..." It requires more effort, part intellectual and part imaginative, than for someone who comes from abroad. The Gemara (Ketubot 75a) cites a verse, "And of Zion it shall be said, this man and that man [meaning everyone] were born there" (Tehillim 87:5). Noting the repetition of the word "ish," "man," the Gemara explains, "Echad hanolad bah, ve-echad ha-metzapeh lir'otah," that the appellation of "born there" applies both to those who were actually born there and to those who yearned to see it. Each of them has a connection to Zion.

In the continuation of the Gemara there, Abbaye says that if one needs to choose between these two, between those in Israel and those who hope to get there, priority is to be given to those born there. He states that one person born in Israel is worth two born in Babylonia. The Gemara then cites the view of Rava, who makes the reverse claim: one person who comes from Babylonia to Israel is worth two who were born there.

What is the nature of this priority? In what way is a person who has come from abroad to be preferred over one who was born in Israel?

The answer seems to be clear. Someone who began his life in Israel, was raised on its holiness and with a deep connection to it, views its existence as entirely normal and takes it for granted. Someone who grew up with a different reality, however, yearns to come, dreams of living his life here, and sees Israel more as a vision than as a reality. In one sense, the Gemara says, one who grew up in Israel is preferable, for he is suffused with its existence. On the other hand, the Gemara adds, one who grew up outside Israel and comes to it, has the ability to integrate the yearning and the reality. Though he is not rooted in Israel, he carries with him the yearning and desire for the land.

When we approach this Gemara, we should not view these approaches as mutually exclusive. Each of us should see it as a challenge to integrate these two elements in his consciousness. Even those who were born here should strive for the better aspects of both. On one hand, those of you who merited to be born here, should be deeply rooted in your existence here. Do not lose sight of the natural and normal existence you have had here, remaining firm and rooted in that existence in Israel.

On the other hand, you should feel wonder and yearning in your relationship with this land, and not only because we still lack so much. Even if we lacked nothing, the feeling should still be there.

Those who were born in Israel should appreciate the naturalness and rootedness with which they were raised, recognizing that it is far beyond the reality of previous generations. They also should live with the wonder and the recognition of G-d's great kindness that is inherent in this existence. At the same time, we should all hope and pray for better days.

[This sicha was delivered at the Yeshiva's Mesibat Yom Ha-atzma'ut, 5762 (2002).] Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash Alon Shevut, Gush Etzion 90433 E-Mail: Yhe@Etzion.Org.II Or Office@Etzion.Org.II Copyright (c) 2004 Yeshivat Har Etzion All Rights Reserved.

From: SHLOMO KATZ [skatz@torah.org] Sent April 22, 2004
 Subject: HaMaayan / The Torah Spring - Parashat Tazria-Metzora
 Hamaayan / The Torah Spring EDITED BY SHLOMO KATZ

We are now in the midst of counting the Omer. R' David Avudraham z"l (13th-14th century Spain) writes that one reason that Hashem commanded us to count the Omer is that during this period, people are busy with the harvest and are dispersed in the fields. In order that people not forget to travel to Yerushalayim for Shavuot, Hashem instructed us to keep count of the days.

Another reason for counting the Omer is that Hashem decrees the year's grain output on Pesach and its fruit output on Shavuot. (See Rosh Hashanah 16a). We count off the days between these two days of judgment to remind us to repent.

Yet another reason, R' Avudraham writes, is found in a Midrash: To what may the Exodus of Bnei Yisrael from Egypt be compared? To a prince who was imprisoned in jail and who screamed for the king to release him and to give him the king's daughter as a wife. After the prince was released, he counted the days until he would marry the princess. Similarly, after Bnei Yisrael were freed from Egypt, they counted the days until they would receive the Torah. (Sefer Avudraham: Sefirat Ha'omer)

As part of our preparations for receiving the Torah, we read a chapter of Pirkei Avot every week during this period. R' Avudraham explains (in the name of R' Yisrael ben Yisrael z"l) that since we are eagerly awaiting the arrival of our loved one -- the Torah -- we study the chapters of Pirkei Avot which encourage us to behave in the way that the loved one would expect. (Sefer Avudraham: Seder Yemei Ha'omer)

"This is the Torah of the tzara'at affliction . . ." (13:59)

"This shall be the Torah of the metzora . . ." (14:2)

the Torah of one in whom there is a tzara'at . . ." (14:32)

is the Torah for every tzara'at affliction . . ." (14:54)

the Torah of tzara'at." (14:57)

"This is

"This

"This is the

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi teaches in the Midrash Rabbah: The word "Torah" appears five times in connection with the metzora (one who is afflicted with tzara'at). The word "Metzora" alludes to "motzi shem ra" /

one who speaks ill of another, and tzara'at is in fact a punishment for speaking lashon hara. The five-time repetition of "Torah" teaches that one who speaks lashon hara transgresses all five books of the Torah. Therefore, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi concludes, Moshe Rabbeinu warned the Jewish people regarding the laws of tzara'at.

What is this Midrash teaching? asks R' Moshe Gruenwald z"l (rabbi of Huszt, Hungary; died 1909). Didn't Moshe warn the Jewish people against all of the Torah's transgressions, even those that are not equal to violating all five books of the Torah?

He explains: An argument could be made that the laws of tzara'at should have been addressed to the kohanim. It is the kohanim, after all, who are delegated to "diagnose" tzara'at and to accept the offerings brought by the "recovered" metzora. Why, the Midrash wonders, did Moshe address these laws to all of the Jewish people, not just to the kohanim? Indeed, why were the laws of the metzora's offerings (chapter 14) not addressed by G-d to Aharon as were the laws that precede and follow them (chapters 13 and 15)? The answer, says the Midrash, is that Moshe was to make a special point to all of the Jewish people: speaking lashon hara is equivalent to violating all five books of the Torah. (Arugat Habosem)

Why are the laws of lashon hara so difficult to observe? R' Moshe Rosenstein z"l (mashgiach of the Lomza Yeshiva; died 1930) suggests that it is because the laws appear to many people to be illogical. After all, why is lashon hara viewed so severely? Why can't I speak negatively of another person if I am speaking the truth? [Ed. note: People commonly defend themselves when confronted with having spoken lashon hara by saying, "But it's true." The halachah makes clear that this is not a defense. Even true statements are prohibited. Why?]

R' Rosenstein offers several explanations: First, imagine that you were hired with a group of other individuals to weed a large field. Pulling up every single weed is back-breaking work, and there is no doubt that no worker, including you, would do a perfect job. Would you criticize your fellow workers for not finishing their jobs when you have not finished yours either? Or, would you praise their incomplete jobs, knowing that you also look good if they are praised? [R' Rosenstein says that he does not need to explain the parable because its meaning is obvious. Simply put, to the extent that we overlook the faults of others, our own less than perfect characters and actions can be overlooked also. Conversely, if we focus on others' faults, then our faults will be highlighted a well.]

In addition, writes R' Rosenstein, it is impossible not to exaggerate when describing the faults of another. Thus, even if one intends to tell only the truth, he is bound to tell a lie.

Finally, one who sees a fault in another is bound to rebuke him. Thus, one who speaks about another instead of to him is neglecting the mitzvah of giving rebuke. (Ahavat Meisharim p. 32)

Pirkei Avot

"Take care regarding a `lighter' mitzvah as you would a `stricter' mitzvah, for you do not know the reward that is paid for mitzvot." (Chapter 2)

R' Yitzchak of Volozhin z"l (1780-1849; son and successor to R' Chaim of Volozhin) asks: Why couldn't the mishnah say, "you do not know the reward for mitzvot"? What is added by, "that is paid"?

He answers with a parable. Two merchants (call them Reuven and Shimon) traveled to the market day in a distant town. Reuven had a cousin in that town (call him Levi), so the two travelers stopped-in at Levi's house instead of going to an inn. Levi was overjoyed to see his relative, Reuven, and the two of them sat down to catch up on family happenings while dinner was prepared. Shimon, having no part in this discussion, went to take a nap.

By the time dinner was ready, Shimon was sound asleep. Reuven tried to awaken his fellow traveler, but Shimon preferred to remain in bed. In

exasperation, Reuven said, "How much would you pay for a dinner such as this at the inn? Here it is being offered for free!"

Explains R' Yitzchak: We read in Devarim (30:11-14), "For this commandment that I command you today -- it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven, [for you] to say, 'Who can ascend to the heaven for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?' Nor is it across the sea, [for you] to say, 'Who can cross to the other side of the sea for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?' Rather, the matter is very near to you -- in your mouth and your heart -- to perform it." Rashi comments: "It is not in heaven" - for were it in heaven, it would still be your duty to go up after it and to learn it." Accordingly, says R' Yitzchak, we must appreciate the kindness that Hashem did for us by giving us the Torah. We do not realize the reward that we would have to pay for the mitzvot if G-d had not given them to us for free. This is what the mishnah is teaching.

(Mili D'Avot)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehadgil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives are available starting with Rosh HaShanah 5758 (1997) at <http://www.torah.org/learning/hamaayan/>. Text archives from 1990 through the present are available at <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com]

To: Peninim Parsha

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM

... PARSHAS METZORAH This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification. (14:2)

Living outside the camp of society, the metzora has the opportunity to reflect upon the effect of his disparaging words. He learns to realize how much evil he has generated. Words can hurt. They can also soothe. They can ameliorate one's grief. They can also cause untold pain. They can lift one's spirit. They can also cause crushing despair. They can bolster one's confidence. They can also rob one of his dignity. It all depends on one's thoughtfulness in speech - or his malevolence. And what about words spoken in anger, with no aforethought? How many families have such harshly spoken words divided? How many friendships have they destroyed? How many marriages have they soured? Words used thoughtfully can enhance relationships, raise reputations, make people feel good - about themselves and others.

Words are not cheap; the old adage, "names will never harm me," is not true. Names do cause harm. Just ask any adult who had been called a name as a child. Ask him if he still remembers the name, and if it still bothers him. Then there are the words which we have not said, the compliment we did not give, the apology we did not make. This is especially true of parents and teachers. That little compliment, the few words of encouragement, the smile that comes with a job well done, goes a long way. Everybody thrives on a compliment; some hunger for it. It goes without saying that the derogatory or thoughtless remarks we make to our children and students can come back to haunt us later in life.

The following story demonstrates the devastating effect of a parent's scornful comment. It is a story about a woman who survived the

Holocaust, moved to Eretz Yisrael and became an intelligent and articulate member of the community. She would often reminisce about her childhood in pre World War II Europe. Once, during her musings, she declared that one of the happiest recollections of her life was the day in which she was forcibly taken by the Nazis from her home and transferred to an extermination camp.

Those listening to her story were understandably taken aback. Responding to their shocked expressions, she explained that her family situation was far from ideal. Apparently, her older sister had been the favored, frum, observant daughter, while she was the rebellious one. If there was one pat of butter and one pat of margarine, her sister would get the butter, while she would get the margarine. "After all," her mother would explain, "your older sister is exhausted from davening with such great kavanah, concentration, while you probably skipped a few pages. You can do with less."

The derision would increase and become more spiteful when she did something to anger her parents - which, regrettably, occurred more often than not. In anger, her mother would complain, "You probably are not even my biological daughter! Your sister was born at home, whereas you were born in a public clinic. The doctors probably exchanged my real daughter with you." This was certainly not her mother's usually refrain, but the painful effect of a derisive comment endures.

In 1942, the Nazis came to her hometown and rounded up the children. Only she and her parents were home at the time. Her father immediately wrote a kvittel to the Gerrer Rebbe. Her mother threw herself at the feet of the Nazi beasts, begging that they spare her child, "Please, I beg you. Let my child stay. I will do anything. I cannot live without her!" She entreated upon deaf ears.

The young girl, now turned adult, remembered that moment with great joy. "I felt no pain; I had no fear," she said. "I was overjoyed to finally hear that my mother truly loved me as a child." The affirmation that she was, indeed, her own and beloved daughter, that she was accepted and not rejected, overshadowed the fear of being taken away to her death.

Imagine, after all these years, this woman looked back on a devastating experience as being her greatest source of joy. After all, it was this experience that erased the pain in her heart that had been caused by words.

And immerse himself in the water and become pure. Thereafter, he may enter the camp. (14:8)

The punishment for speaking lashon hora is meant to teach the slanderer a lesson. He now has some idea regarding the effect of his words. As a result of his slanderous tongue, he caused a break in relationships between people. Let him live alone, far from the center of the community, so that he will begin to realize the harmful consequences of his vile mouth. Furthermore, when he is alone, he now has time to introspect and focus on his life. He now has the opportunity to change his overall demeanor and work on bettering his character. Last, as Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, explains, the metzora, having been distanced from the three machanos, encampments, now realizes that Hashem views him as being on a very low spiritual plateau. The reason for this is that a person's position relative to the center of kedushah, sanctity, is an indicator of his spiritual position.

There is a direct corollary between the two positions. This is to be noted from the fact that the Kohen Gadol walks into the Kodshei Hakodoshim, Holy of Holies, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, only after having been away from his home for seven days prior to Yom Kippur. During his separation period, he lives on the Har Habayis, Temple Mount, in preparation for his awesome experience. Residing in this elevated Makom, place, of kedushah, has a powerful effect on the Kohen Gadol - one which now gives him access to the Holy of Holies. Thus, the metzora, who is sent away from his original home, now understands that his spiritual position has now been changed; he has been distanced from his original standing.

Once we understand the depth of the punishment, we now have an idea of the incredible reward in store for he who speaks positively of Klal Yisrael collectively, as well as each Jew individually. The Toesfta in Meseches Sotah 4:1 says that Hashem's reward is five hundred times greater than His punishment. This is all the more reason to look for the positive aspect in every person's behavior. At times, it might take a bit of imagination to see the positive, as the following story demonstrates.

Two friends worked together, side by side, for an institution in Eretz Yisrael for many years. After awhile, one of them suddenly passed away. The funeral was attended by many of Yerushalayim's elite, among them Horav Aryeh Levine, zl. It happened that Rav Aryeh was walking in the funeral procession together with the surviving friend, when the man left the procession and ran into a flower shop. A few minutes later, he rejoined the procession, this time carrying a flowerpot with him. The man's action shocked Rav Aryeh, who was fully aware of his lifelong relationship with the deceased. It continued to bother him until he decided that he must give the man mussar, reproach, for his lack of respect for his friend. He began by asking, "Can you please enlighten me why you felt it necessary to leave your friend's funeral procession to buy a potted plant?"

"Rebbe, let me explain my actions," the man replied. "Yesterday, a man who was being treated for leprosy passed away in the hospital. My friend, the deceased, was very close to this leper and would visit him often. When the leper died, the hospital staff was about to burn all of his effects due to contamination. The problem was that among his few possessions were his Tefillin. My friend had been negotiating with the hospital administration concerning the Tefillin. At the end, the hospital deferred and agreed to have the Tefillin stored in a flowerpot and then removed and buried in the ground. There was one condition: They had to have the flowerpot in the hospital by 12:00PM - today. Regrettably, my friend died suddenly and the risk of the Tefillin being destroyed was considerable. This is why I left the procession to purchase a flowerpot, and I am going immediately to the hospital to bury the Tefillin. Rav Aryeh concluded the story by emphasizing to what length one must go to judge another person favorably.

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-- Parshat Tazria - Metzora
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Tazria
- So Far Away "The Kohen shall look, and behold! - the affliction has covered his entire flesh, then he will declare the affliction to be pure" (13:13).

Tzara'at, frequently mistranslated as leprosy, was a disease caused by spiritual defects, such as speaking lashon hara (slander). (Nowadays we are on such a low level spiritually that our bodies do not reflect the state of our spiritual health in this way.)

The verse here is puzzling for if "the affliction has covered the entire flesh" of the person that must mean that he is far from pure, and yet the Torah tells us that the Kohen shall "declare the affliction pure". How can he be pure if the affliction covers his whole body?

The answer is that he is so far from being cured, having ignored all the warnings to do teshuva repentance, that the disease ceases to perform any further purpose. Thus the Torah specifically says not that the Kohen shall declare him pure, rather that "the affliction is pure" - he, on the other hand, is as far from purity as is possible.

- Based on the Ha'amek Davar and Rabbi S. R. Hirsch Metzora

-Boomerang "...and he shall be brought to the Kohen." (14:3).

When a person speaks lashon hara it indicates that he has no concept of the power of speech; that he considers words to be insignificant in comparison to actions. As the nursery rhyme says "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me."

Nothing could be further from the truth. When a person speaks evil, he awakes a prosecutor in Heaven, not only against the target of his speech, but also against himself. An angel stands by the side of each of us recording our every word. In order to teach those who speak slander the power of just one word, the Torah instructs that the offender be brought to the Kohen. But, even as he is on his way to the Kohen, his body covered with tzara'at for all to see, and until the Kohen actually pronounces the word "Impure!" he is still considered totally pure. Similarly, he cannot regain his former status, although his disease has healed completely, until the Kohen again pronounces him to be spiritually pure. From this, the speaker of lashon hara is taught to reflect on the power of each and every word. For with one word he can be made an outcast, and with one word he can be redeemed.

- Based on Ohel Yaakov

Written and compiled by RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

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From: RabbiWein@jewishdestiny.com Sent: April 22, 2004 RABBI WEIN'S WEEKLY COLUMNS

April 23, 2004 THE WONDER OF IT ALL

This coming Monday, the fifth day of Iyar 5764, marks the fifty-sixth anniversary of the birth of the State of Israel. Justifiably absorbed as we are by the struggles that we are engaged in currently - with regard to security, and in the economic, social, political, and religious sphere - we oftentimes lose sight of the wonder that that exists in the mere fact that there is any type of Jewish state anywhere in this world, let alone in its ancient ancestral home. The usual rule in history is that there are no comebacks allowed - gone is gone. That rule is true for mighty empires as much as it is for small weak nations. All of the major empires that began the twentieth century - Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Turks, and Japan - failed to survive that bloody and turbulent century. Out of this ash heap of nations and empires somehow a Jewish state arose, unwanted and unappreciated by most of the world and even by major sections of the Jewish world as well. Since the majority of the readers of this column were not alive in 1948 when the state came into being, they will never be able to truly appreciate what its birth meant to the Jewish world at that moment in our history.

I remember walking to the synagogue with my father in Chicago that Friday afternoon when the state was declared. My father, a Jew from Lithuania, with a thousand years of longing for Zion and Jerusalem baked into his soul, wept all of the way to the synagogue. My father was never a person who showed much emotion on the outside. His tears shocked me, but as I myself became older and began to appreciate that moment in Jewish history, I too shared his tears. Even the anti-Zionist parties here in Israel then blessed the occasion and appreciated the watershed event in our history. After the tragedy of the Holocaust, when Jewry the world over was exhausted emotionally, spiritually and physically, with hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees in internment and Displaced Persons camps throughout Europe and Cyprus, the state arose as a beacon of hope and refuge, a place to settle and rebuild lives, personally and nationally. I remember how the survivors of Europe limped into Chicago after the war, how despairing all of us were of the future of the Jewish people, how few were our numbers in the fledgling Jewish day schools then struggling to establish themselves. The creation of the state stiffened Jewish resolve and pointed us in a different direction with a more positive mood and a belief in ourselves. The attempt to crush the state at its birth failed, as all of the other many attempts to do so since also have failed. The current terrorist campaign against us will also fail and at the end it will have damaged our enemies far more than it will have hurt us. In spite of all of the tremendous difficulties, the state has grown, prospered and become strong and viable. It is the envy of us by others that fuels much of the anti-Israel hatred around the world.

If memory regarding the true wondrous nature of the creation of the state and the timeliness of its birth is fading, then it should be replaced by vision. The State of Israel is defined as being democratic and Jewish and somehow these two ideas must learn to live with each other as peacefully and harmoniously as possible. The vision of what a Jewish state should look like, how it must be unique and not merely a pale copy of the worst aspects of present-day Western culture, has to be formulated and articulated. This could be the greatest contribution of religious Jewry here in this country, I feel, to represent and publicize such a vision. Sadly, until now it has not even attempted to address this task, let alone devise a program for implementation. No society can grow and prosper without a positive sense of direction and purpose. Merely wishing to survive, as important and necessary as

that is, is not nation-building. Addressing our future, infusing it with belief and faith, strengthening our sense of past and tradition, cleaning up our act and casting away the bad habits of exile and corruption, are the necessary components of a visionary future. Realizing the wonder of the past fifty-six years will help us in building such a visionary future for our descendants and ourselves.

Parsha Archive April 23, 2004 TAZRIA - METZORA

Purity and impurity are not very popular subjects in today's modern world. Because of this current mind-set, the subject matter of the two parshiyot that form this week's Torah reading is certainly strange, foreign, even completely alien to us. What is the Torah's view of tahara - purity - and tumah - impurity, and how does it affect us? And what are we to understand from the complicated laws of negaim - the dreaded dermatological diseases described in these two parshiyot? These questions are not only real in our world, but they have nagged at the souls of many generations of Jews. But perhaps in our times, more than at any other times in the recent centuries, we are able to identify with the benefits of purity and the damage done to our souls and psyches by impurity. Purity is a goal, a state of achievement and accomplishment. It represents the conscious effort to raise one's self from being a mere mortal, a higher species of animal. Therefore, in order to accomplish this process and to reach this exalted goal, the Torah describes for us the painstakingly difficult method of discovery, diagnosis, isolation, contemplation and sacrifice which alone leads to purity and can ward off and even transform for good the most dreaded of impurities.

Purity, in Jewish life, thought and tradition, is built upon correct and holy speech, rigorous observance of the Torah norms of sexual morality and behavior and upon honest and compassionate behavior towards one's fellow human beings. The violation of any of these three basic pillars of Judaism allows the cancer of impurity to take root in the heart and soul and mind of the person. Impurity of heart and mind is what allows one to mock the righteous and ridicule the pious. It seduces us to think that sin is not evil, wrong is somehow not harmful, that there can be such an action as "victimless crime." Impurity desensitizes us to the needs and problems of others. It allows us to speak maliciously and harmfully about others and to not even realize the harm that we are perpetrating. It makes us callous and empty, boorish and dangerous. It is not for naught that the Rabbis commented in the book of Avot that "a boor cannot be a G-d-fearing person." Impurity defeats us as no other state of being can. And therefore the Torah stresses constantly the requirement of striving for purity in our thought processes, in our life attitudes, in our behavior patterns and human relationships.

In biblical times, purity and impurity were more easily identifiable than they are today. One's skin, so to speak, told the person at what level of purity or impurity he stood. The kohen, the holy priest, was present to diagnose and cure impurities and to provide the necessary moral and physical help to encourage the transformation into a holy person. Today we see no visual signs of impurity on our bodies. But we would have to be completely bereft of our senses not to be aware of the impurities of the society that we live in. We literally wallow in a sea of impurity of thought and evil behavior and we are bombarded constantly by messages and examples of gross impurity and maliciously evil behavior. And we are alone in combating these evils, since the impurity of society ridicules any public attempt at raising the level of purity of that society. Thus we are left to pursue our own lonely, painful, but necessary struggle for self-improvement and the search for personal purity and immortality. We need to search within ourselves instead of on our external skin alone for the ravages of impurity. And we must commit ourselves to the struggle for purity that the Torah demands of us. In essence, we must become our own kohen and thereby raise ourselves to Torah standards of purity.

Shabat Shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

www.RabbiWein.com Please note our new address and phone number: 386 Route 59 Suite 13 Monsey, NY 10952 800-499-WEIN(9346) 845-368-1528 FAX info@jewishdestiny.com