

# מתוקים מדבש



## Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

RABBI MICHA BERGER

### Bemachashavah Techilah

At the end of the healing process after *tzara'as*, the *metaheir*, the person seeking *taharah*, brings two sacrifices. "And the *kohen* raises the *olah* (burnt offering) and the *minchah* to the *mizbei'ach*, *vechipeir alav hakohen vetaheir* – and the *kohen* gains his *kaparah*, his atonement, and he becomes *tahor*."<sup>1</sup> The *Yom Kippur Amidah* quotes a similar *pasuk* "For on this day, *yechaper aleichem, litaher eschem* – [Hashem] will grant *kaparah* onto you, to purify you – from all your sins."<sup>2</sup> There is a progression: *kaparah* and *taharah*.

The root of *kaparah*, כפר, means to cover (cf. *kapores*, the cover of the *aron*). The *pasuk* about *Yom Kippur* uses the idiom "yechaper aleichem", place a cover on you.

The second step given in the *pasuk* is "vetaheir – and he becomes *tahor*." What does it mean to be *tamei* or *tahor*? When the Torah discusses the subject, *taharah* is presented as a primary value, not explaining it in terms of a higher goal. The explanation Hashem gives us for certain animals being non-kosher is merely "*tamei hu lachem* — it is *tamei* to you."<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere, we find *tahor* used to mean pure; for example, pure gold is repeatedly called "*zahav tahor*."<sup>4</sup>

This, then, is the progression in the *pasuk*, "the *kohen* gains his *kaparah*", covering and containing, "and he becomes *tahor*," unadulterated by that which is contained.

*Taharah is the purity of the mind from physical prejudices. Tum'ah is its adulteration, so that the decision-making process cannot be freed of the physical urges.*

But we are not told: What is it that is contained and no longer adulterating, and what is it that thereby kept pure?

The Ramchal defines the personal attribute called *taharah*:

"*Taharah is the correction of the heart and thoughts... Its essence is that man should not leave room for the inclination in his actions. Rather, all his actions should be on the side of wisdom and awe [for the Almighty], and not on the side of sin and desire. This is even in those things which are of the body and physical.*"<sup>5</sup>

To the Ramchal, *taharah* is purity of the "heart and thoughts". The *tahor* man has "no room for the physical." It is the purity of the

deciding mind from the physical creature.

To cast the words of the Ramchal into different terms, *taharah* and *tum'ah* focus on the relationship between the *ruach* and the *nefesh*. *Taharah* is the purity of the mind from physical prejudices.

*Tum'ah* is its adulteration, so that the decision-making process cannot be freed of the physical urges.

This is Mussar's description of a personality trait called "*taharah*." The halachah's concept seems to derive directly from it. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch describes the *tum'ah* of a dead body.

"A dead human body tends to bring home to one's mind a fact which is able to give support to that pernicious misconception which is called *tum'ah*. For, in fact, there lies before us actual evidence that Man must — willy-nilly — submit to the power of physical forces. That in this corpse that lies before us, it is not the real human being, that the real human being, the actual Man, which the powers of physical force can not touch, had departed from here before the body — merely its earthly envelope — could fall under the withering law of earthly Nature; more, that as long as the real Man, with his free-willed self-determining G-dly nature was present in the body, the body itself was freed from forced obedience to the purely physical

<sup>1</sup> Vayikra 14:20

<sup>2</sup> Vayikra 16:30

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 11:4

<sup>4</sup> Shimos 25:31

<sup>5</sup> Mesilas Yesharim Ch. 16

*demands, and was elevated into the sphere of moral freedom in all its powers of action and also of enjoyment...*<sup>6</sup>

Rav Hirsch portrays the *tamei* object as one that causes the illusion that man is nothing more than a physical object, an animal, a helpless subject to physical forces and physical desires. Whereas in reality, man is his soul, and with a soul, the body acts according to free will, not simply buffeted by the forces around it. Since the *tamei* is that which reinforces the idea that man is a being of mere physicality, *tum'ah* is only associated with the dead bodies of animals “whose body-formation is similar to that of Man, primarily the larger mammals.” The *shemonah sheratzim*, the only smaller animals that are *tamei*, are vertebrates “that live in the vicinity of human beings”— the weasel, mouse, mole, etc.... All these are animals we see about us, living much as we do. The animals that more closely resemble man have stricter rules of *tum'ah*. This would explain why the beginning of the *parashah* tells us that childbirth also causes *tum'ah*; it is a physical process that happens to the mother, beyond her control, in which she is “willy-nilly submitting to the power of physical forces.”

To become *tahor*, we immerse in a *mikvah*. The root of “*mikvah*” is ambiguous. The straightforward definition would be “a gathering of water,” which a *mikvah* is in a very literal sense. But the word can also be read “source of hope.” Perhaps this is an allusion to the idea that it

<sup>6</sup> Commentary on Lev. 11:47

provides us with the faith that we are not mere creatures of the laws of biology, but can rise above those laws to master our own fate.

But what about *tzara'as*? The sins generally associated as causing *tzara'as* are not those that demonstrate a preoccupation with physicality, but rather those of

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interpersonal relationships: *lashon hara*, or egotism. Second, the *tzara'as* itself is a punishment; the cure therefore indicates that the person has already obtained atonement. So what is the *kaparah* and *taharah* the *metzarah* acquires through sacrifices? The habitual speaker of *lashon hara* who gets *tzara'as* is forced to reassess his self. He is instantly reduced to the bottom of the social ladder, not someone in a position to speak ill of others or to think himself greater than them. However, this comes at a price; the *metzarah* is thrust downward by being made a victim of his body. The *metzarah* is made to feel as a passive subject, a body, an object – *tamei*. The *korbanos* are for *kaparah* and *taharah* from the effects of the *tzara'as*, not its cause.

This sense of victimhood, or creature-ness, is at the root of the Epicurean creed, “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die.” The beauty of Judaism is that it gives us the tools to be creative, to bring the body and its drives back

to its role as a tool of our free will and higher calling, and clear the mind back to an unbiased view of the world. The *metzarah* rejoins society.

R. Eliyahu Dessler<sup>7</sup> describes what it means when we say that free will is a war between good and evil.

As in all battles, there is a front where the actual fighting occurs, the *bechirah*-point. Beyond each army's side, there is no fighting. The line of war is a dynamic thing, with each decision it moves either one way or the other. This is what the Mishnah in Avos means “One mitzvah causes the next.” With each mitzvah, the *bechirah*-point moves, the fighting moves in the right direction, the next mitzvah becomes that much easier. And, unfortunately, in the reverse, each *aveirah* makes the next that much easier until *na'aseh lo keheter* – it becomes to him as if permissible.

By our actions we can move parts of either one's physical drives, or (more positively) our spiritual ones, so that they can cause action with little or no decision-making effort. This is the power of habit.

We can now explain our opening question, the relationship between the two steps given in the *pasuk*. First, we ask Hashem to help us achieve *kaparah*, covering or containing our physical drives. Then, we proceed to the next step – *taharah*, to purify the mind from the effects of habits formed while we were serving them, from allowing them to determine our decisions and our self-perceptions.

<sup>7</sup> Michtav Mei'Eliyahu I

## Bakeish Shalom

The midrash relates a story about a peddler who would travel through the streets of a city and ask, “Who wants a potion of life?” He once went to Akko and the daughter of Rabbi Yanai heard him. She told this to her father, who then called over the peddler and asked him to show this potion that he was selling. The peddler took out a book of Tehillim and turned to the passage “Who is the man who desires life and loves days that he may see good? [Keep your tongue from evil And your lips from speaking deceit.]” (Tehillim 34:13-14). Rabbi Yanai was so pleased that he gave this peddler six coins and fed him a large meal.

Rabbi Yanai’s students puzzledly asked him, “Did you not already know this verse?” Rabbi Yanai responded, “Yes, but this peddler clarified it for me.”<sup>1</sup>

The question can be asked why anyone would think that a peddler wandering the streets has the secret to a long life. Are people really so foolish that they believe an incredibly powerful and potent formula such as that would be unknown to the general public and held solely by a wandering peddler?

R’ Itzeleh Blaser, one of the top students of R’ Yisrael Salanter, explained that truly desperate people will grasp at any straw. Someone whose life is in danger will try any kind of remedy, no matter how remote it may be. That is why charlatans prey on the deathly ill and sometimes draw exorbitant fees for their sham services. People with everything at

stake will try anything with even a remote possibility. That is why people living in cities would believe that a peddler would have a potion that could give health and long life.

If so, asked Reb Itzeleh, why is it that people do not realize how precarious their spiritual situation is, how easily they can sin and earn themselves great punishment in this world and the next? If people would realize the desperation of their circumstance and understand how serious their situation they would seek any spiritual remedy available just like they try any health remedy for their difficult health problems. That, Reb Itzeleh

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suggested, was the message of the peddler. He was trying to show people that their spiritual health is in just as much danger as their physical health. Just like people need to actively seek cures for their health problems, they also need to work on their spiritual defects and make themselves religiously healthier.

Then, we can ask, why is it that people do not recognize their spiritual danger and seek out solutions to their religious problems? Reb Itzeleh explained that the problem is that people do not truly believe that they will be punished for their sins. Granted, we might mouth our assent to this dogma, but we do not truly and completely believe it. If we did, we would sense the effect of even a

“minor” sin and recognize the urgency in our current situations. We would be scared for our eternal lives and, indeed, grasp at any remedy offered by a peddler on the street. But, sadly, we lack that belief.

I would like to suggest a different answer to this last question. A serious problem that every *oved Hashem* faces is maintaining consistency in religious feelings. There are many promises made on Yom Kippur, particularly during *ne’ilah*, that seem to get lost months or even weeks later. Daily prayers may be an emotional and spiritual high, but

that early morning peak fades as the day’s routine unfolds. And when even prayer becomes a routine, finding that spiritual high, that closeness to G-d, becomes more and more difficult. *Hesech HaDa’as* is, ultimately, the source of all sin.

Only if we forget that we are constantly standing before G-d can we even consider sinning.

When someone is seriously ill, it is only through great effort that he can forget his disease. But forgetting about G-d and our obligations to Him is quite easy. Speaking *lashon hara* and bringing punishment on ourselves is easy because we automatically forget the urgency to avoid it.

The Rama begins his glosses on the Shulchan Aruch with the following verse: “*Shivisi Hashem lenegdi samid* – I have set the Lord continually before me” (Tehillim 16:8). “This,” the Rama tells us, “is an important principle in Torah and the heights of the righteous who walk before G-d, because a man

<sup>1</sup> Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 767. Cf. Avodah Zarah 18b.

does not sit, move and interact in his house all alone like he does before a great king. His speech and expression with his family is not the same as his speech when with a king. Even moreso should a man consider in his heart that this great king is G-d whose glory fills the

entire world and who stands over a person and sees what he does... Immediately [upon realization of this] one will arrive at fear and frightened submission to G-d and constant embarrassment of Him."

The fear a person has of becoming seriously ill is similar to

the fear that we must have of sinning before G-d. However, we must overcome our natural tendency to submerge our fear of G-d below our daily routine. This is no small task, one that requires planning and action – mussar.

**REB ARNOLD LUSTIGER**

## Sefasai Tiftach

There is a natural desire among us, the prayer community who speak to Hashem daily, to find a *bracha* within *Shemoneh Esrei* upon which to focus to address the ongoing "matzav" in Israel. Fortunately, such a *bracha* is identified by Rashi in Megillah 17b, (s.v. *Aschalta Degeulah Hi*). Rashi explains that the *bracha* of *Go'el Yisrael* does not refer to the future messianic redemption, since this theme is covered later in the *Shemoneh Esrei* within the *brachos* of *Boneh Yerushalayim* and *Matzmiach Keren Yeshua*. Instead, the *bracha* of *Go'el Yisrael* constitutes a request that "He should redeem us from the troubles that constantly beset us". As proof to Rashi's explanation, one can cite the Mishnah in Ta'anis 15a which explains that during public fasts, the *bracha* of *Re'ay Ve'onyeinu* was augmented to include the request that "He who answered our forefather Avraham at *Har HaMoriyah* answer us and hear our [present] cry". Inserting this phrase in the *bracha* suggests that the description of Hashem as *Go'el* can refer to His role not only in the ultimate redemption, but in "intermediate" redemptions as well.

*Re'ay Ve'onyeinu* means "witness our distress". Rav Solo-

veitchik explains that we ask G-d not only to answer the prayer of those of us who are fortunate enough to address the Creator daily through *tefillah*, but also to look upon those who are in distress and do not pray. As an historical precedent to this idea, the Torah describes the initial stage of prayer by the enslaved Jews in Egypt: "...and their cry ascended (*vata'al shavasam*) unto G-d by reason of the bondage" (Shemos 2:23). At this point in their slavery experience, Israel had no intention of formulating prayer as such. This was little more than a poorly articulated, instinctive cry. According to the Ramban, *vata'al shavasam* suggests that Hashem Himself "elevated" their groaning, upgrading their speechless lament to full-fledged *tefillah*, thereby initiating the process of the exodus from Egypt.

In the same vein, the Alter of Slabodka explained the stanza in *Ana Bekocah: Shavaseinu Kabel Ushema Tza'akaseinu Yode'a Ta'alumos: Accept/ hear our cry, O Knower of the hidden*". Hashem accepts and hears our cries, even though they are hidden. Indeed, the Mishnah in Ta'anis invokes Avraham at *Har HaMoriyah*, because, despite his distress at the *akeidah*, Avraham raised no outcry at all.

Although Avraham's *nisayon* was borne in silence, Hashem, the *Yode'a Ta'alumos*, "listened"; he "answered" our forefather Avraham.

The Rav's explanation has particular resonance to our *matzav* today. The majority of Israelis are secular and unfortunately do not apprehend the nature of *tefillah*. Yet, their *shav'a*, their cry of pain strongly resonates. The *bracha* of *Re'ay Ve'onyeinu* prompts us to bind our conscious prayer with their subliminal cry. Through our dual "prayers" may we be *zocheh* to pierce heaven and attain redemption.

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