

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

PARDES INSTITUTE OF JEWISH STUDIES

Doorways to Prayer

by Rabbi Levi Cooper

When we enter a synagogue, our first impulse is generally to find a seat. Where do you like to sit in the synagogue? Do you enter and quietly try to find a seat in the back rows, or do you try to blend in with the congregation by sitting in the middle of the sanctuary? Or maybe you prefer not to sit, hanging about the door and leaning on the back wall? Perhaps you enter and stride purposefully to the front so that you can "have a seat by the eastern wall," in the words of Shalom Aleichem's Tevia the milkman.

The Talmud tells us that upon entering a synagogue, a person should traverse two doors (B. Berachot 8a; Y. Berachot 9a). The sages base this directive on the verse: "Happy is the person who listens to Me, who comes quickly to My doors every day, to guard the doorposts of My entranceways" (Proverbs 8:34). Daily entrance is understood to denote the daily prayer services in the synagogue, and the use of the plural - doors - is interpreted as the need for two doors.

The Talmud, however, questions this directive, assuming that the sages could not be giving architectural advice about the requisite number of doorways of a kosher synagogue. The prescription is thus elucidated: When entering a synagogue we should walk the measure of two doors and subsequently pray.

The instruction remains cryptic: What is meant by "the measure of two doors?" The commentators have grappled with this guideline, offering two schools of understanding. The medieval scholars interpreted the "measure of two doors" as physical dimensions of space or time, while the hassidic masters understood these doorways in spiritual terms.

From the medieval period, Rashi (France, 11th century) explains that we should not sit near the entryway of the synagogue. Rather, we should walk a distance of two door widths, so it does not appear that we are anticipating a hasty exit to liberate ourselves from the burdens of prayer. Apparently, Rashi would not approve of those of us who choose to stand near the door.

There is a caveat, however, to the proscription of sitting near the door: If you sit in your assigned seat in the synagogue which happens to be near the exit, you suffer no censure, for it is clear that you are not

planning a quick escape (Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi, Spain, 13th century and others).

Spanish commentators from the late 12th and early 13th centuries preferred to render the talmudic passage in terms of time rather than space, explaining that we should allot the time it takes to traverse two doors for our minds to settle and focus before we begin praying. Rushing into prayers gives the impression that we wish to be rid of a burden, and hinders quality, heartfelt service (Rashba, HaRah, Rosh, Ritva and others).

Unlike the medieval commentators, the hassidic masters understood traversing two doors to be a spiritual formula. One master suggests that the two doors are the paths of awe and love. Meaningful prayer can only be achieved by opening both the gate of awe and the gate of love (Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Epstein, Cracow, 18th-19th centuries).

The present Boyaner Rebbe suggested that the sages are referring to the two doors that guard our speech - our teeth and our lips. As we enter the synagogue we cross these two gates, closing them behind us, and ensuring that time spent in prayer is not mingled with idle conversation (Sichot Kodesh, 27 Ellul 5757).

Looking at the words of the Boyaner Rebbe from a different angle, we could suggest that before praying we must enter deep inside ourselves, past our teeth and lips, ensuring that we are not merely offering lip service. When we turn to G-d we aim at praying from deep in our hearts.

Turning from the words of the medieval and hassidic greats, a parallel rabbinic passage in the Midrash seems to offer insight into this talmudic directive (Devarim Rabbah 7:2). Why, ask our sages, should you traverse a door beyond a door when entering the synagogue? "Because the Holy One, blessed be He, counts your steps and gives reward."

Although this exchange does not explicate the meaning of the two doors - for that we must look to the commentators - it provides an overarching framework for understanding the instruction to enter through two doors: The further we enter into the synagogue - physically and perhaps spiritually as well - the more significant our entry is considered.

Anecdotally, in 1901, the wealthy Zalman Nozyk built a synagogue in Warsaw. With 600 seats it was not the largest synagogue in this culturally rich city,

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though it was intended for Warsaw Jewry's elite and to host great cantors. Today, it is the only surviving synagogue in a city that once contained countless houses of prayer. A regular service is held there to this day.

Before the Holocaust, seats in the Nozyk Shul were sold an entire year in advance, and the price of each seat was determined by the distance from the Ark. The more expensive seats were at the front, while places near the exit were cheaper.

Though it is highly unlikely that this policy was rooted in the Midrash's urging us to step further into the synagogue, there is an interesting parallel: The further into the sanctuary we go, the dearer our steps become.

Each step into the synagogue is a show of commitment. This Midrash paints a colorful image: Like an expectant lover, G-d waits to see how close His beloved will come, counting the steps and perhaps hoping for intimacy.

Each movement through a door is an advancement in our relationship with G-d. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word used for doors is the regular plural, indicating a minimum of two doorways that should be traversed.

Opening the door to enter into the synagogue is not just a matter of finding a seat to recite the prayers. It is a step in building a relationship with G-d. © 2006 Rabbi L Cooper & Pardes Institute. Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post "Upfront" Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Much of Sefer Vayikra details the various offerings brought in the Mishkan and in the Temple. Many lessons are learned (such as the severity of various sins in G-d's eyes based on the type of offering needed for atonement), but since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago, we can no longer actively follow their specific laws. This week's Torah reading deals primarily with the laws surrounding one who gets "tzora'as," a skin condition that causes the afflicted to become "tamay" (ritually unclean),

including the procedure necessary to become "tahor" (ritually pure). It seems fitting that it is included in Sefer Vayikra, as we no longer follow these specific laws either. After all, have you ever heard of anyone going to a local kohain (or rabbi) to ask whether the change in their skin was "tzora'as," and how to deal with its ramifications?

"This purification of the one afflicted with tzora'as is applicable in [the Land of] Israel and outside of it, whether there is a Temple or not" (Rambam, Hilchos Tumas Tzora'as 11:6). If one who develops "tzora'as" is required to go through the Torah's purification process, why is this aspect of the Torah's requirements ignored? This question is asked by the Tiferes Yisroel in his introduction to Maseches Nega'im (Mar'eh Kohain 39), where he relates that he posed the question to Rabbi Akiva Eiger, who responded that he was also puzzled by it.

When discussing which kohanim are disqualified from eating "terumah," the Rambam (Hilchos Terumos 7:9) includes a kohain afflicted with tzora'as, "provided that the kohain that made him tamay (i.e. determined that the affliction was tzora'as and declared him tamay) could verify his kohanic lineage." The Radvaz explains that the status of being tamay is not automatic, but only takes affect after the kohain proclaims that he is tamay. This is evidenced by the fact that all items are removed from a home suspected of having tzora'as before it is examined by the kohain (Vayikra 14:36). If the house becomes tamay based on the tzora'as even without the kohain declaring it tamay, there would be no reason to remove these items—they are already tamay. It is only because the tumah doesn't start until after the kohain's proclamation that removing them helps. Similarly, if on Yom Tov one suspects that he has developed tzora'as, he does not go to have a kohain examine it until after the Yom Tov is over (so as not to ruin his holiday; see Moed Katan 7b). Here too, we would not let him come in contact with others if the tzora'as itself brought on the tumah even before the kohain said "it is tamay." Therefore, the Radvaz says, "even if the signs of full-blown tzora'as appear, he is tahor until a verified kohain declares him tamay. And for this reason, the tumah associated with tzora'as is no longer applicable today, as we no longer have any verified kohanim." The Shiras Dovid asks (and leaves unanswered) why having no verified kohanim affects these laws, but not others. For example, we still "redeem" our firstborn sons, even though we have no verified kohanim through which to redeem them. Just as we do what we can there by using a non-verified kohain, even if we don't have a verified kohain we should at least approach a non-verified one to look at a condition that might be tzora'as.

It would seem, though, that the two are not comparable. We know that the firstborn son needs to be redeemed, and is in an "unredeemed" state until a

valid redemption takes place. We therefore make every attempt to enact such redemption by dealing with all that we have, i.e. an unverified kohain. Tzora'as, on the other hand, is only a problem after the kohain declares him tamay. Going to an unverified kohain will only make matters worse, by creating a possible situation of tumah that will now require purification.

There is another possibility as well. The Ramban, commenting on the commandment being given to the kohanim and not to the entire nation (13:1), explains that there is no need to address the nation in this regard "for the kohanim when they see others that are tamay will force them to [go through the] purification process." In other words, the Torah placed the onus on the kohanim to declare those with tzora'as as being tamay, not that there is an obligation on the individual to verify whether or not he has tzora'as by going to the kohain. If so, we can understand why no one is running to a non-verified kohain to become declared tamay when there is no way to complete the purification process (see Mar'eh Kohain 39), since they have no obligation to go in the first place. (Why a kohain today is not obligated will be discussed later.)

But even according to those that say the obligation is on the individual to show his possible tzora'as to the kohain (see Chinuch 169), it is based on the Torah telling us "and he (the potential metzora) should be brought to Aharon the kohain or to one of his sons [who are] kohanim" (13:2), i.e. even against his will. This requirement to go (or be brought) to "the" kohain may only apply if we can verify that he is a kohain (that he comes from the lineage of Aharon). If there is no obligation to go to an unverified kohain, we can understand why no one does. This may be what the Radvaz means by saying that we need a verified kohain; the only kohain that we are required to go to for a tzora'as determination, or that can enact the tumah, is a verified kohain, one that we know comes from Aharon. Without that, the practical fulfillment of these laws is impossible.

However, the Rambam's mentioning the requirement of being able to verify that one is a kohain does not necessarily mean that a verifiable kohain is necessary to enact the tumah (if he really is a kohain). The Rambam is discussing where terumah from produce grown outside of Israel cannot be eaten by a kohain. Since this "terumah" is only treated as "holy" rabbinically, we would need proof of the tumah before prohibiting the kohain from eating it. If there is no verified kohain to create the tumah, we can't "know" that the afflicted is really tamay, and he is therefore allowed to eat it.

The Midrash Lekach Tov (pg. 70) quotes Rav Yochanan saying "from the day the Temple was destroyed there is no longer the means to make anyone tamay from tzora'as." From the context of this statement and the comments made by the author of

this midrash, it is apparent that Rav Yochanan is referring to a concept mentioned in the Talmud (Arachin 3a), that only a kohain that is an expert in the details of what constitutes tzora'as is allowed to try to determine whether someone has it (or, if a non-kohain is an expert, he can make the determination and then explain it to the kohain who can proclaim the person tamay). As the Rambam puts it (Hilchos Tumas Tzora'as 9:2), "it is forbidden for [a kohain] to see any [skin] affliction unless he was taught [how to] by his teacher and [until] he is an expert in all of the types of [skin] afflictions and how they are referred to: all the [skin] afflictions [that can afflict] man, and the afflictions of clothing and the afflictions of houses." Without anybody having the tradition from earlier generations about every single type of affliction, it is no longer possible for anyone to even attempt to determine if a skin condition is indeed tzora'as.

Why would a kohain need to be a complete expert (or be able to rely on one) before being allowed to declare a possible case of tzora'as as actually being tzora'as? Perhaps it is precisely because it is the proclamation that creates the tumah that we don't allow anybody to make such a proclamation unless they are definitively a kohain and can say that this is definitively tzora'as. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

All halacha, or for that matter all systems of law in the world, is based on the concept of reasonable presumptions. In Jewish law this is called the concept of chazaka-the presumption that what was, still is. Thus halacha presumes that a husband is still alive even if he has somehow disappeared from sight. It presumes that things found in a certain place were at that place before and were not dragged there. It presumes that if there are no known faults in a person's pedigree then that person's pedigree is deemed to be faultless. There are many other examples of how chazaka works as an operating principle in Jewish law. In fact, the Talmud exclaims: "gedolah chazaka"-chazaka is a great and overriding principle of law. The basis for this halachic reliance on chazaka is found in this week's Torah reading.

One of the negaim described in this week's Torah reading is a type of nega that infects one's house. The kohein that inspects the house to determine if the nega has spread has to decide the issue upon the inspection of the premises. The Talmud asks that perhaps the nega spread or shrunk in the few seconds that it took the kohein to leave the house, for only then is he to render his opinion regarding the nega. Thus, any decision that he may make regarding the impurity or purity of the nega is not really provable in fact. The Talmud therefore resorts to the idea of chazaka-the presumption that whatever size the nega was an instant

ago when the kohein inspected it is still the same size when he departs from the house.

Presumptions in life are valid. People are judged on their past behavior, on family history, on pedigree and on past experiences. It is foolish to ignore presumptions that are based on legitimate grounds. One cannot ignore the realities that stare one in the face even if those realities do not conform to one's ideology or wishful view of life. This applies in all areas of personal and national life. One cannot presume that one's child will turn out all right if he or she is not given the basis of a strong Torah education. There is a chazaka that speaks against such wishful thinking.

One cannot wish one's enemies away and become convinced that the tiger is no longer carnivorous. But the main lesson of chazaka is to be aware that human nature does not easily change and that what was is most likely what will be now as well. The lessons of Jewish history, of what works and what fails, form a strong presumption-gedolah chazaka. All of the "newness" of ideas in today's Jewish society has, in reality, existed before and failed to contribute to Jewish continuity and national strength and security. The past is a hard taskmaster and a coercive instructor with regard to current choices and where decisions are concerned. Ignoring the past and its chazaka is a perilous course, one that certainly should be avoided at all costs. © 2006 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

Perhaps the separation points to a difference between Jewish and fundamentalist Christian approaches to sexuality. In Christianity the basic purpose of sex is procreation. In Judaism, as important as pru u'rvu (procreation) may be, onah, that is, sexual pleasure as an expression of deep love, is even more important. Note the words of Ramban: "Speak words which arouse her to passion, union, love, desire and eros." (Epistle of Holiness) Of course, such words and actions should be reciprocated by wife to husband.

It may be suggested that a time frame of separation is mandated to heighten the physical encounter. A kind of pause that refreshes, allowing for the love encounter between husband and wife to be more wholesome, more beautiful.

A second approach comes to mind. Martin Buber speaks of an I-it encounter, where the "I" relates

to the other as a thing, an object to be manipulated and used to satisfy the "I." This in contrast to the I-thou encounter where the other is a persona, a subject to be considered and loved.

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

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

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

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

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

These rationales do not explain why the separation takes place at the time of niddus (menstruation) or why immersion in a mikveh is crucial for purification, but they may offer some understanding of why the Torah sees the separation as a conduit to enhancing love between husband and wife. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“And she shall count the seven days after her impurity" (Lev. 15:28) I write these lines the morning before the advent of the final day of the Passover holiday, during the period of the count of the omer between Passover and Shavuot, and after having spent a sleepless night because of the horrific suicide-bomber attack in Tel Aviv which has thus far

claimed nine innocent lives. How can I square the headlines of the daily paper with our festival of freedom? And if indeed the days between Passover and Shavuot are a kind of hol hamoed (Intermediate days of a Festival) between our Festival of Freedom and our Festival of First Fruits celebrated in Jerusalem, how can I rejoice on Israeli Independence Day with the national threat of an escalation of suicide bombings and the existential-international threat of a nuclear Iran looming in the background?

In order to begin to understand the message and the meaning of our Hebrew calendar, we must first query the significance of matza - the crumbly, half-baked and unfinished, tasteless and flat poor-cousin to the fresh and full-flavored pumpernickel - as well as the curious lack of a name for the festival of Shavuot; the feast of weeks seems hardly appropriate, since it connotes the period leading up to the Festival rather than to the day of the Festival itself!

There are many commentaries who see the word matzot (plural of matzah, one piece of unleavened bread) as being identical with the word mitzvot (plural of mitzvah, a Divine command), since the same Hebrew letters can spell out either of these two words; and then, conversely, hametz must be identified with sin or transgression. However, how does this fit into the fact that on the festival of Shavuot - the climax of Pesach when we think of the omer count as linking them together - we must bring two loaves of bread, specifically hametz and not matzah, as our major Temple offering?!

When we remember that the very first Passover Seder took place on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, before midnight, before the slaughtering of the Egyptian first-born by G-d, and while the Israelites were still slaves in Egypt (see Exodus 12), we realize that Passover cannot possibly be our Festival of Freedom; at best, it can only be the festival of our expectation of freedom, of G-d's promise that we will be freed, of only the first, incipient signs of our freedom. Indeed, even after we left Egypt the next morning, we only got as far as the torrid-by-day, freezing-by-night, waterless and stateless, desert - and we had not even received our Torah!

For the actual achievement of freedom we would have to await the Festival of Shavuot, the day of the Revelation at Sinai, and the time when we could celebrate the beloved first fruits of our Israeli produce brought to our Holy Temple in Jerusalem. This period of true freedom and redemption remains elusive to this very day; perhaps that's why Shavuot has not yet acquired a name of its own.

But nevertheless, we are commanded to count the days between Passover and Shavuot (Lev.23:15), just as we are commanded to count the years between the Sabbatical years and the fiftieth jubilee year (Leviticus 25:8-12): in both instances, the march from

redemption promised to redemption realized. And the Hebrew word for counting is sefirah, the very word used in our Biblical portion wherein a ritually impure woman is commanded to count the seven days leading to her purification. The root noun of sefirah is sapir, the blue-white color identified with the Divine purity and revelation emerging from the ethereal heavens (Exodus 24:10), and which has therefore become the symbol of the Divine Commandments (through our blue-white ritual fringes) and of the flag of the modern State of Israel.

The message which lies herein is indubitably clear: we must remain eternally grateful for the initial signs of freedom and the Divine promise that we will ultimately attain it - witness our Passover celebration; and we must even take heed to - and even celebrate - our days of preparation for the eventual redemption, and attempt to purify ourselves for that eventuality religiously and politically. And so we count the days between Passover and Shavuot, even though Shavuot remains fixed as a time not yet realized but as a goal very much worthy of striving towards. We link our Passover Seder to our vision of redemption by expounding the passage of the Bible recited by the Jew bringing his first fruits to the Holy Temple alter in Jerusalem, Arami Oved Avi (Haggadah). And we revel in the fact that both Israeli Independence Day and Jerusalem Day come out during the sefirah count between Passover and Shavuot, certainly as a sign that the achievement of our goal is closer than it has been for more than 2000 years!

It is also fascinating that although the Mishna (Pesachim 10) ordains that we recite Arami Oved Avi (Deut. 26:1-11) until its conclusion, the Haggadah deletes the last three verses: "And He brought us to this place and He gave us this land, flowing with milk and honey. And now behold I have brought the first fruits of the land which You have given me, oh Lord.' And you shall place it before the Lord your G-d and you shall bow down before the Lord your G-d. And you shall rejoice for all the good which the Lord your G-d has given you and your household, you and the Levite and the stranger who is within your midst."

In my celebration of Yom HaAtzmaut at home, at the "traditional" barbecue I enjoy with my family, I precede my blessing over wine with a recitation of the Biblical chapter of the dry bones which come to life (Ezekiel 37), followed by a recitation of these last three verses deleted by the haggadah; these words serve as a confirmation of G-ds having brought us back to our homeland, as a statement of hope and faith that we may soon see the restoration of the first fruits ceremony at the Holy Temple, and as a prayer of thanksgiving for what our generation has been privileged to receive - despite the external and internal dangers which still face us.

Redemption is a process, and the Dayenu song must teach us to be grateful for the advances we have achieved rather than disappointed because of that which still remains to be accomplished. And in the final analysis, the sefirah count tells us that the achievement of the final vision depends a great deal on our own self purification! © 2006 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

A command to send the impure people out of the camp of the nation appears in the Torah portion of Nasso: "Command Bnei Yisrael, and let them expel from the camp everyone with a blemish-'tzaraat'- or an impure flow- a 'zav'-and everyone who is impure from contact with the dead" [Bamidbar 5:2]. This implies that all the people with impurities are to be sent away from the camp. This week's Torah portion, on the other hand, seems to imply that the law is different, since it only refers to one who has a physical blemish: "All the days that he has the blemish he will remain impure, let him sit alone, his place is outside the camp" [Vayikra 13:46]. What is more, at the end of this week's portion the Torah goes into detail about the laws of blemishes but does not mention expulsion from the camp at all. How are the passages related, and why are a person with tzaraat and one with an impure flow treated differently in one passage and treated similarly in the other?

Evidently the two passages are related to different aspects of being kept away from the camp. The Torah portion of Nasso is concerned with the obligation of the nation to expel impure people from the camp, and the reason for this is given explicitly: "Let them not contaminate their camps, where I dwell among them" [Bamidbar 5:3]. In order to maintain the holiness of the camps it is necessary to send the impure people away, and from this point of view there is no difference between various types of impurity.

In this week's Torah portion, the point of departure is not the status of the camps but rather the laws of the individual who is impure because of a blemish of the type of metzora. In general it is clear that the laws of a metzora are much more stringent than those of a zav, a person with an impure bodily flow. A metzora is required to observe difficult customs similar to a time of mourning and to warn other people not to come into contact with him. "Let his garments be untidy and let his head be wild, and let him cover himself completely, and he shall call out, 'Impure, impure'" [Vayikra 13:45]. Evidently in contrast to other types of ritual impurity, which can be considered as natural occurrences, the blemish of a metzora is seen as a punishment for sins, as can be seen explicitly with respect to incidents involving various people in the Tanach (such as Miriam, Geichazi, and Uziyahu). The

many detailed laws of metzora are part of a process of atonement and repentance which should bring the sinner back to society at a higher level than when he became impure. Thus, the fact that a metzora is required to sit away from the main camp can be seen as part of the process of his atonement. This is not an obligation of Bnei Yisrael as a whole but part of the process of the individual, and it is therefore not defined as "expulsion." This also explains why no obligation is mentioned to send away one with an impure flow, since what he needs is to go through a process of individual purification and not atonement.

When we compare the two Torah portions, it becomes clear that the "zav" must be kept outside the camp only from the viewpoint of the portion of Nasso, as a result of the need for Bnei Yisrael to maintain a camp that is ritually pure. The metzora is kept outside the camp for an additional reason-as part of his own process of repentance, which requires him to be separated from the rest of the community. This difference of viewpoint has halachic ramifications. A "zav" is only sent out of the Divine camp (the Temple itself) and the camp of the Levites, based on the understanding that he contaminates these two camps. A metzora, on the other hand, is also sent away from the camp of Yisrael, showing that he must be kept away from all society until he achieves atonement and purity. (See: Pesachim 67a).

Jerusalem Cannot Become Impure Because of a Nega by Rabbi Danny Isaac, Head of "Beit Orot" Hesder Yeshiva, Jerusalem

The sages derive from the verse, "And I will place a blemish of 'tzaraat' in a house within your heritage" [Vayikra 14:34], that Jerusalem can never become impure with blemishes, since it was never divided up as a heritage among the different tribes (Bava Kama 82b). What is the connection between a blemish and the way the land is divided among the tribes?

It is written, "A man says to his friend, please lend me a measure of wheat, and he replies, I do not have any. What about a measure of barley? I do not have any. And what about a measure of dates? I do not have any... What does the Almighty do? He causes the house to have a 'nega'-a blemish-and since the man is then required to empty the house of everything, the others see all that he possesses. They ask: Didn't this man say he has nothing? Look how much wheat he has, how much barley, and how many dates. The house has been cursed, and it is right that this should have happened." [Vayikra Rabba 17]. This is derived from the verse, "I will put a blemish of tzaraat in a house within your heritage"-that is, in the houses of those who selfishly maintain possession of the land and refuse to give anything to others.

The Midrash adds, "Blemishes appear for ten reasons... Because of the evil eye, as is written, 'Let the one who possesses the house come...' [14:35] -- this refers to one who keeps the house for himself and does not want to give any benefits to others." Evidently the miserly feeling increases when a man has a heritage and begins to gather wealth. He feels that the walls of the house separate the inside of the house, which belongs exclusively to him, from the outside world. This is an honest man, who has earned his wealth in a righteous way and by hard work, and he therefore does not see any need to share what he has with others. Why shouldn't the others make the same efforts that he did? Therefore, "the Kohen shall give a command, and the stones that have the blemish will be removed" [14:40]. The owner must break down the walls of the house, so that he will no longer be able to remain in his own private area.

This explains the wording of the verse, "When you come to the Land of Canaan which I give to you as a heritage, and I will put a blemish of tzara'at in a house within your heritage." The Almighty gave us this heritage, even though we sometimes feel that it belongs to us, since we took possession by ourselves. If we would remember that the Almighty is the one who gave us strength to achieve wealth, we would not become miserly.

Jerusalem belongs to all of Yisrael, and it was therefore not divided among the tribes (and it should certainly not be given to other nations). The holy Shechina dwells in Jerusalem, and we should therefore not be afraid that its residents will fall to the lowest levels of selfishness and miserly feeling, and there is therefore no way that the houses will develop a nega. Jerusalem represents all of Eretz Yisrael, as is written in the Zohar, "All of Eretz Yisrael is folded underneath Jerusalem." The viewpoint of Jerusalem, which breaks down all the borders which divide us, influences Eretz Yisrael as a whole, so that we can hope and pray for the privilege of living a true and holy Jewish life.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

The Torah discusses various kinds of "leprous" afflictions which can befall man, his clothing and his home. The whole section is difficult for us to understand because the Torah speaks of "tzora'as," which is a phenomenon with which we are not personally familiar. Nevertheless, we must learn these laws. In addition to teaching us the finer points of the laws, the Sages, as always, were acutely sensitive to any moral or ethical lesson that can be learned from them. Following is a verse which describes a step in the procedure, once a sign of "tzora'as" is found on the walls of a house.

"He whose house it is, shall come and tell the Priest saying: Like an eruption has appeared to me in the house." (Leviticus 14:35)

"Like an eruption has appeared to me in the house"-RASHI: "Even if he is a talmid chochom (a learned man) and he knows that (this discoloration on the wall) is certainly an affliction (of tzora'as), nevertheless he should not decide the matter with certainty and say 'An eruption has appeared to me.'"

Rashi offers us a moral lesson in modesty. What is the basis for this lesson?

What is bothering Rashi?

An Answer: The verse uses strange wording-"LIKE an eruption..." Why not say simply "an eruption has appeared..."? The word "like" teaches us that the homeowner, no matter who he may be, must present the situation to the Priest in an uncertain way. He may think he knows for certain that this mark on his wall is a clear indication of tzora'as, nevertheless he must be hesitant and say only "it looks LIKE a tzora'as."

How fitting that Rashi should teach us this lesson. He himself followed it often, as we know from his commentary. Over seventy times in his commentary on Tanach, Rashi admits "I do not know what this comes to teach us." He could have remained silent. Yet he made the point so that the student would realize there is a problem with the verse, though Rashi himself could not figure out the answer. And in the process he taught us a lesson in modesty. © 2006 Dr. A. Bonchek and Aish.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, reveals to us a secret dimension of this significant date. In fact, as we will discover, Rosh Chodesh possesses the potential of assuming a greater personality than ever seen before. Its heightened effect will be so powerful that it will be likened to the impact of one of our three Yomim Tovim.

The prophet opens the haftorah with a fiery message regarding the privilege of sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash. Yeshaya declares in the name of Hashem, "The heavens are My throne and the earth is My foot stool. What home can you build for Me and what is an appropriate site for My Divine Presence?" The Radak explains that Hashem was rejecting the notion of His requiring an earthly abode wherein to reside. Even the span of the universe barely serves as a throne where upon Hashem rests, how much more so our small Bais Hamikdash. But the purpose of His earthly abode is in order for us to experience His Divine presence. And it is in this uplifting environment that we offer sacrifices to Hashem and commit ourselves to fulfilling His will.

Yeshaya continues and expresses Hashem's view of the Jewish people's sacrifices at that time. Hashem says, "One who slaughters the ox is likened to

slaughtering a man; he who sacrifices the sheep is akin to slashing a dog's neck; a meal offering is like swine's blood....(66:3) The Radak explains Hashem's disturbance and informs us of the attitude of those times. The people would heavily engage in sin and then appear in the Bais Hamikdash to offer their sacrificial atonement. However, this uplifting experience was short-lived and they would return home and revert to their sinful ways. Hashem responded and rejected their sacrifices because the main facet of the sacrifice was missing, the resolve to elevate oneself. From Hashem's perspective, a sacrifice without an accompanying commitment was nothing more than an act of slashing a useful animal.

The prophet continues and notes the stark contrast between the above mentioned and the humble and low spirited people. Hashem says, "But to this I gaze, to the humble and low spirited and to the one who trembles over My word." (66:2) These humble people do not need the experience of the Bais Hamikdash. They sense the Divine Presence wherever they are and respond with proper reverence and humility. Unlike the first group who limits Hashem's presence to the walls of the Bais Hamikdash, the second views the earth as Hashem's footstool and reacts accordingly. In fact we are told earlier by Yeshaya that they are actually an abode for His presence as is stated, "So says Hashem, "I rest in the exalted and sanctified spheres and amongst the downtrodden and low spirited ones."(57: 15)

In a certain sense we resemble the first group when relating to our Rosh Chodesh experience. Rosh Chodesh is a unique holiday because its entire festivity consists of a special Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. There are nonspecific acts of Mitzva related to Rosh Chodesh and there is no halachic restriction from productive activity. However, the first day of the month provides the opportunity for introspect. After our serious contemplation over the previous month's achievements we welcome the opportunity of a fresh start. We offer a sacrifice in atonement for the past and prepare ourselves for the challenges of the new month. Unfortunately this new opportunity is met with trepidation and is always accompanied by mixed feelings of joy and remorse. Because each Rosh Chodesh we realize how far we have strayed during the previous month and we look towards the next month to be an improvement over the past.

This is the limited status of our present Rosh Chodesh. However, as we will soon learn, a greater dimension of Rosh Chodesh was intended to be and will eventually become a reality. The Tur in Orach Chaim (417) quotes the Pirkei D'R'Eliezer which reveals that Rosh Chodesh was actually intended to be a full scale Yom Tov. The Tur quotes his brother R' Yehuda who explains that the three Yomim Tovim correspond to our three patriarchs and that the twelve

days of Rosh Chodesh were intended to correspond to the twelve tribes. This link reveals that each Rosh Chodesh truly has a unique aspect to itself and that one of the Biblical tribes' remarkable qualities is available to us each month. However, as the Tur explains, due to an unfortunate error of the Jewish people this opportunity has been, to a large degree, withheld from us.

But in the era of Mashiach this error will be rectified and the experience of Rosh Chodesh will actually reach its intended capacity. Yeshaya reflects upon this and says at the close of our haftarah, "And it will be that from month to month.... all will come and prostrate themselves before Hashem." (66:23) The Psikta Rabbsi (1:3) explains that in the days of Mashiach we will have the privilege of uniting with Hashem every Rosh Chodesh. All Jewish people will come to the Bais Hamikdash each month and experience His Divine Presence. During the illustrious era of Mashiach sin will no longer exist and Rosh Chodesh will be viewed exclusively as an opportunity for elevation. Each month will provide us its respective quality and opportunity which we will celebrate through the Rosh Chodesh festivities. The sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh will reflect our great joy over being with Hashem and will no longer contain any aspect of remorse or sin. In those days, the experience of His Divine Presence in the Bais Hamikdash will be perpetuated throughout the month and the entire period will become one uplifting experience.

This, according to the Maharit Algazi is the meaning of our Mussaf section wherein we state, "When they would offer sacrifices of favor and goats as sin offerings.... May you establish a new altar in Zion.... and we will offer goats with favor." With these words we are acknowledging the fact that the goats which had previously served as sin offerings will now become expressions of elevation. Without the need to reflect upon our shortcomings of the previous month, Rosh Chodesh will be greeted with total happiness, and we will welcome with great joy the uplifting spiritual opportunity of each respective month. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org



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