

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**MACHON ZOMET**

### Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

One of the most frequent words in this week's Torah portion is the word "or" ? skin. It appears forty-four times in Chapter 13 (which is almost two-thirds of the total times that the word appears in the entire Bible!). While this is understandable with respect to a human "nega"? since such a blemish mainly appears on human skin? it is surprising to see the same word in the final passage in the portion, with respect to a nega of a garment. In this case, the word refers to leather. The passage opens with the laws of a nega of a garment, which can appear in different types of cloth: "If a garment has a nega, in a garment made of wool or of linen... or in leather or anything made of leather" [Vayikra 13:47-48]. The Torah repeatedly notes that these laws pertain to leather or a garment made of leather: "And the nega will be dark green or dark red, in the garment or the leather... [13:49]. The nega has spread on the garment, up or across, either in leather or wherever leather is used for the work... [13:51]. And if the Kohen sees that the nega is dim after it has been washed, and he shall tear it from the garment or from the leather... [13:56]." These are just a few of many examples, until the end of the passage. Why does the Torah mention leather again and again, especially with respect to a blemish in a garment? The Ramban took note of this surprising repetition, and explained that the purpose of the Torah is to emphasize that "tzaraat" is an unnatural phenomenon, which appears only in reaction to a sin. "The simple explanation is that in every verse the phrase 'garment, the leather, up, or across,' is repeated, because what happens is a miracle."

However, we can add another explanation for this emphasis. Perhaps the repeated mention of the word "or" in the passage about the blemish of a garment implies that there is a link between a human nega, discussed in the beginning of the chapter, and a nega of a garment, which appears in the later section. This relationship emphasizes the main difference between the two parts of the chapter. With respect to a human nega, the Torah repeats for all the different types of nega that there is a possibility for the blemish and the person to be cured, in different ways. For example: "And if the Kohen sees him on the seventh

day again, and the nega is dim and it has not spread in the skin, the Kohen shall declare him to be pure, it is a 'mispachat.' And let him wash his clothing, and he will become pure" [13:6]. Similar texts appear in verses 13, 17, 23, 28, 34, 37, 36. As opposed to this, with respect to the laws of nega of a garment or of leather the Torah does not describe any way to achieve complete purification. The most positive situation that is described occurs after two sequences of waiting seven days and washing the garment. "And behold, the nega is dim after it has been washed"? then, "Let him tear it out of the garment or the leather" [13:56]. That is, the best possibility is to be in a situation where the nega itself can be removed from the garment or the leather, leaving the rest of the material in a pure state.

Thus, we can see the advantage that a human being has over a garment or something made out of leather: when leather becomes ritually impure, it can never return to its former pure status. But human skin has the capability of spiritual mending and physical cure, so that a man can return and renew his former status.

**RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG**

### Between the Lines

This week's Torah portion primarily deals with the phenomenon of a "negah"- a physical skin disease that expresses a spiritual ailment. The Sefer Yetzirah (2:7) states that there is nothing greater than "oneg" (delight) and nothing lower than "negah." How are we to understand this enigmatic remark?

The Midrash Socher Tov (citing Rebbe Yitzchak on Psalm 92) notes that all aspects of Shabbat are doubled. In the Holy Temple, the meal offering consisted of a double portion (Exodus 16:22); the animal offerings consisted of two lambs (Numbers 29:9); the punishment for desecrating Shabbat is described with double wording (Exodus 31:14); the reward for observing Shabbat contains double wording (Isaiah 58:13); the commandment to observe Shabbat appears in two forms, "zachor" (Exodus 20:8) and "shamor" (Deut. 5:12); and the Psalm that was sung on Shabbat has two names, "mizmor" and "shir" (Psalms 92:1).

According to the Shem MiShmuel, the Midrash is not merely mentioning that Shabbat is associated with double expressions. Rather, we learn from here that the very essence of Shabbat is twofold. On one

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hand, Shabbat is called the "secret of oneness" (Zohar), through which all Jews are equated. On the other hand, Shabbat is likened to the Coming World, where every righteous person receives reward based on his individual merit (see Shmot Rabba 52:3 and Shabbat 152a). The Shem MiShmuel explains these two aspects as follows:

All Jewish people are equal when it comes to refraining from transgressions. In passivity, we are all alike. This is the first aspect of Shabbat-the oneness in which all Jews are equated. The other aspect of Shabbat, as we mentioned, is where each person receives reward based on individual merit. This refers to the mitzvot that require action to fulfill. Far from being equated in this realm, we each grow differently depending on how much energy, sincerity, and pure intention we put into our performance of mitzvot.

We can broaden this discussion and suggest that the Jewish people have a dual mission. We have a unified, national mission, in which we are all equated. However, each individual has a unique, specific mission as well- a mission that is different from everyone else's.

Typically, the idea of a personal mission is understood to mean using our individual talents to bring something unique into the world. Based on the Shem MiShmuel, we now see that we can also fulfill our individual mission through our performance of mitzvot. Although everyone's actions might appear to be identical, in reality, each person performs mitzvot with a different degree of enthusiasm and care.

The "metzora"-the one smitten with a spiritual skin disease-is disqualified from both his national and his individual mission. The Torah tells us (Leviticus 13:46) that the metzora dwells alone, which the Talmud (Arachin 16b) understands to mean "outside the Jewish camp." This enforced solitude symbolizes the metzora's disqualification from the Jewish people's national purpose.

Furthermore, we learn that the metzora is locked away for a week (Leviticus 13:4) or sometimes two weeks (Leviticus 13:5). This shows us that different people require different amounts of time to extricate themselves from their spiritual degradation. The amount of time necessary for each metzora to heal is based on the unique way he developed his corrupt

behavior. This demonstrates the ruination of the metzora's individual mission, since the time it takes him to heal is directly based on how much effort he put into performing transgressions.

Now we can finally understand the comment from the Sefer Yetzirah that there is nothing greater than oneg and nothing lower than negah. (This is a play on words: both are composed of the three letters ayin, nun, gimmel.) The word oneg is frequently used in association with Shabbat. Nothing is greater than the oneg of Shabbat because, as we stated, the essence of Shabbat is twofold. Shabbat fully expresses both the national and the individual purpose of the Jewish people, thus symbolizing serving G-d in totality and completion. Negah, on the other hand, symbolizes the utter degradation of the metzora, who is disqualified from both his national and individual mission. Nothing could be lower than this inability to fulfill one's purpose on any level.

May we all be doubly blessed to live up to our national and individual missions, thereby enabling us to serve G-d in totality and completion. © 2007 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.com

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**W**hen Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai asked his students (Avos 2:9) which one path a person should take (that would provide the best chance for ultimate spiritual success), Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya said, "a good friend." Friendship is of primary importance, and the commentators explain why it is so necessary to have a good friend (or friends) in order to get closer to G-d (and to keep continually getting closer).

Rashi, by telling us that Rabbi Yosi suggested that it was more important to have a "good neighbor" because he sees him more often and can therefore learn more from him, implies that having a good friend (meaning a friend that is good, i.e. righteous) is important because of the positive things that can be learned from him. (Rabbi Yehoshua may not disagree with this assessment, but may have nonetheless chosen a "good friend" because it is the friendship aspect that allows for the ability to learn from each other, and a good friend seen less often because you live in a neighborhood more conducive to personal growth is more valuable than making sure you live right next door to your friend/mentor.)

The Ra'avan, commenting on Rabbi Yehoshua's mirror assertion that a "bad friend" is the most dangerous thing (spiritually), explains that the wrong friends will do just the opposite, leading others to do the wrong things. Other commentators get into more specifics about the value of a good friend (and, by implication, the problem with hanging with the wrong crowd).

The Bartenura says that a "good" friend will give rebuke if something inappropriate is done, thereby not only setting a good example through his own good deeds, but directly helping to correct problems. If we make the correlation to a "bad" friend, it would be more than just not pointing out the flaws, but pretending they don't even exist or aren't flaws at all. Obviously, a real friend will sometimes have to overlook imperfections in order to maintain the friendship (as no one is perfect), and will carefully pick and choose which flaw his friend is ready to try to tackle. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the Jewish concept of friendship is helping each other overcome flaws, not pretending they aren't there. A careful understanding of the laws of rebuke is necessary, including only giving rebuke when and where it will be accepted. Others add that a good friend also provides advice, helps refine the thought process (in life's decisions as well as in learning), stands up and defends you to others even when you are not there, treats you with respect, helps you in times of need, and rejoices with you when things are going well. It is quite clear that having a good friend who is righteous and out for your best interests is extremely valuable, making Rabbi Yehoshua's choice a very good one.

However, it would seem that this answer does not really fit into the context of the conversation. As Rabbeinu Yonah points out, the question was really which internal characteristic ("midah") is the most valuable (which is consistent with the other 3 answers). Having a good friend and/or good neighbor is certainly a valuable thing, but they are external factors, not "midos" to be worked on. How could Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai have said that Rabbi Elazar ben Aruch's answer of having a "good heart" encompasses all the other answers if outside relationships are independent of having a "good heart?"

Because of this question, Rabbeinu Yonah explains "good friend" not as *having* a good friend, but rather as *being* a good friend (and a good neighbor) to others. In order to be a good friend, one has to really work on their (internal) character traits; having a "good heart" can therefore include having the traits necessary to be a good friend. (The difference between being a "good friend" and a "good neighbor" could be whether it is better to focus on one friendship as a means to improving these traits or on a whole circle of people, i.e. the neighbors.)

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of commentators explain Rabbi Yehoshua's answer to be having a good friend (not being one). There are several possible ways of explaining how all 5 answers can still be answering the same question (and how the other 4 can be considered to be included in the 5th).

Rabbeinu Yosef Chiyvan, in Mili de'Avos, says that having a good friend (because of all the above-mentioned qualities) is the key to acquiring all good character traits. We can therefore rephrase Rabban

Yochanan ben Zakai's question from being "which one characteristic will lead to all good characteristics" to "what is the one thing that will lead to having all good characteristics." When he says that all the other answers are included in having a good heart, he may mean that having a good heart will bring about having good friends (and neighbors), as he will then be best suited to choose the right friends and neighborhood (see Sefornu, who seems to put the emphasis on *choosing* the right people to associate with rather than *having* the right friends and neighbors).

The Tiferes Yisroel is among those who understand Rabbi Yehoshua as recommending having a good friend, but with a twist. "For when he (the good, righteous, friend) advises to remove [specific] flaws, he (the one being advised) will not become embarrassed or get angry, because he knows that his [friend's] heart is whole with him (that he is out for his best interest), and will [therefore] follow his advice." The rebuke can only work if the one being rebuked knows that it is truly constructive criticism, not a personal attack. By the same token, he must truly want to improve, or no matter how altruistic the rebuke is, it will be taken personally, and cause dissention rather than improvement. In other words, in order for a true Jewish friendship to exist, each party of the friendship must really want the other to grow, and must really be willing to hear constructive criticism in order to grow. (Whether it is more important to have a good friend or a good neighbor may hinge on whether it is better to be seen more often, allowing for more flaws to be seen and thereby corrected, or if it doesn't really matter how often it can occur, as long as the person is open to growth through constructive criticism, even if the "good friend" who helps him lives elsewhere.)

Being able to accept well-meaning criticism (and even trying to grow from it when it's not so well-intentioned) is a prerequisite for the good, righteous friend to be able to provide the ever-important rebuke. Therefore, in order to have a "good" friend, one must first have this (internal) character trait. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai is pointing out that this trait is also included in having a "good heart." © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**T**he disease of tzoraat, the description and cure of which occupies most of the subject matter of these two parshiyot that we read this Shabat, is closely linked in rabbinic thought and literature with the sin of speaking lashon hara-slander and idle gossip. The connection between the sin of lashon hara and the resultant punishment and consequence of tzoraat is not immediately obvious. And, the fact that tzoraat is no longer clearly definable or even present today further complicates this issue.

The sin of lashon hara unfortunately is still hale and hearty today but apparently its consequences have become invisible to us. One of the many explanations given as to the connection between lashon hara and tzoraat is that lashon hara attempted to "kill" and defame a person in private and secret—a discreet stab in the back tactic—so the punishment was a public physical disfigurement able to be seen by all.

But disfigurement is disfigurement only in relation to the appearance of the general population. If everyone is disfigured in a like manner, so to speak everyone has tzoraat, then no one is really disfigured and the punishment of tzoraat has lost its punch, its deterrent effect. Thus in biblical times, when lashon hara was not yet very commonplace, tzoraat was deemed a just punishment—a public exposure of the slanderer who "kills" secretly. But in later times, when in the words of the Talmud, "everyone is covered with the dust of lashon hara," then tzoraat loses its effect. For as I stated earlier, a society where everyone is disfigured is a society where no one is deemed to be disfigured.

There is a further relationship between tzoraat and lashon hara. Speech, the gift of verbal communication and intercourse, is a uniquely human characteristic. The Targum Onkelos translates the phrase that G-d gave man the breath of life as meaning that G-d gave man the gift of speech and communication. There is nothing therefore more definitive of being a human being than the ability to speak and talk to others.

There is nothing more dehumanizing than being horribly disfigured. All sorts of prosthetic devices have been created to help people minimize their disfigurement. Though our modern society has become more tolerant of people suffering from disfigurement than was the society of our grandparents, we all still feel that the disfigured person is less "human" than the rest of society. Thus the gift of speech promotes the great concept of human uniqueness while the punishment of tzoraat serves to minimize that person's humanity in the eyes of others.

Lashon hara—evil, gossipy speech—dehumanizes us all. It takes a holy vessel, speech and communicative ability, and defiles it and turns it into an instrument of harm and tragedy. Tzoraat came to remind us all of that basic lesson of life. And even though tzoraat is not visible amongst us today, our reading and studying of these two parshiyot of the Shabat serves as a vehicle for us to think about and appreciate the gift of speech given to humans and arrange our speech accordingly. We must wipe off the dust of lashon hara from our bodies and minds. © 2007 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

#### RABBI BORUCH LEFF

### Kol Yaakov

Something is strange. The arrangement throughout the Parshas of Tzaria-Metzora is unusual.

These Parshas describe the laws of tzaarat, a leprosy-type disease that afflicts a person primarily as a result of gossip and slanderous speech, lashon hara. There are three locations where this leprosy can be found: on someone's body, clothing or walls of one's home. The Torah first teaches the laws concerning leprosy and its impurity on the body and then instructs regarding clothing. At this point, Parshat Tazria ends.

Parshat Metzora then opens with a description of the procedure of how one who has tzaarat on his body returns to purity through a sacrificial service. After this long service is discussed, only then do we learn about the laws of leprosy in the walls of the home.

Wouldn't a more logical format have been to discuss the laws of the body, clothing, and the home and only then to discuss how a leper reverts back to purity? Another option would have been to explain the laws of purifying body leprosy together with the laws of becoming a leper of the body. Why does the Torah interrupt the logical flow and only mention the house laws as a last topic, isolating the home leprosy laws from the rest? It would appear that the laws of house leprosy are in a separate category, but why?

A second question, which we will answer first, is the following: The law is that household leprosy can only occur in the Land of Israel and not in lands outside Israel, in exile (Tractate Nega'im 12:4). This is due to the language in the verse, "I will place an affliction upon a house in the land of your possession" (Leviticus 14:34). This is not the case regarding the laws of clothing and body where leprosy can appear even outside Israel. What is the reason for this distinction? If the laws of house leprosy exist as a deterrent and purification process for violations of slander and evil speech, why wouldn't they appear outside of Israel as they do for body and clothing leprosy?

The difference is that we have no real habitations or homes outside Israel. We don't own them. We own our clothing and our bodies wherever we are, but not our homes outside of Israel. We are always hoping and planning to return to Israel and we live in our homes in exile on a temporary basis.

Only that which is truly ours forever is afflicted with leprosy. We must understand that G-d was not haphazard in designing the laws of leprosy as a punishment for lashon hara, slander. He was also not being arbitrary to apply leprosy only to bodies, clothing, and homes. These laws could have easily occurred to silverware, animals, and books, but they didn't. Obviously, there is a strong relationship between slandering and gossiping about someone and receiving

leprosy in general, and in specifically receiving it on body, clothing and home. It is measure-for-measure.

Leprosy is the appropriate consequence for lashon hara because it invades your intimacy and forces you to become humiliated in public-which is what the original gossip did to its victim. Clothing grants a person dignity and the lashon hara invaded the dignity of the one spoken about. Therefore, we strip a gossiper of his clothing.

Similarly, we are driven out of our homes when we speak lashon hara because through our lashon hara we have denied our victim his comfort and privacy in his home. In some cases, he may feel that he must relocate due to the embarrassment that our lashon hara has caused him. At the very least, he does not feel as safe and relaxed in his home as he did before the lashon hara. He may feel somewhat paranoid now that everyone has been talking about him.

So if our lashon hara has removed dignity and privacy from the victim which was truly his own, then the affliction of leprosy can only appear in kind. It will not appear outside Israel in a home that is not truly ours because the consequence does not fit the crime. Even in a case where the subject of the lashon hara also lives in a home outside Israel, leprosy will not come to the gossiper's home. This is because the victim was not stripped of his comfort in his real home. In a sense, he has no actual and real rights to his home outside Israel so he hasn't done much damage within the realm of home. But the damage done to his general dignity and privacy does warrant leprosy appearing on clothes and body since he does truly own his body and clothing no matter which land he lives in.

We derive from all this that the only place where Jews really belong and the only land which we truly own is Israel. Yet, unfortunately most of us who live in the Diaspora don't usually think of our homes as temporary and we rarely contemplate abandoning our comforts in exile in order to fulfill the commandment of living in Israel.

At the very least, we should be hoping and anxiously anticipating returning to Israel when the Mashiach (Messiah) comes. We derive this from Maimonides (Laws of Kings 11:1) "Anyone who does not believe that the Messiah will come or who does not await his coming denies Torah." We must be aware that we are lacking something significant in our lives without Mashiach. There is no greater destruction to the Jewish soul than to lose the awareness of the bitterness of exile and the Diaspora.

There's a story told about a rabbi who was building a yeshiva in America, who appreciated this idea. The contractor offered to use Finnish wood that lasts 150 years, instead of regular wood which usually lasts 90 years before it begins to rot. The rabbi said, "Use the regular wood. We don't want to make our stay outside Israel too permanent."

One of the questions that we will be asked after our 120 years in this world is whether we "yearned for the salvation (of G-d and Israel)" (Shabbat 31a). What does yearning means? It's when a patient takes a biopsy exam and needs to wait 3 days for the results to see if the growth is benign or not. How he yearns! Those 3 days last forever! And on the 3rd day, every phone ring is met with anticipation-will this finally be the call he's been waiting for?

Do we yearn for Mashiach? Often we ask ourselves why do we even need Mashiach? What are we missing? This is a symptom of our spiritual malady. We no longer recognize the need to relate to G-d in the holiest place and in the closest manner, which is what Mashiach will bring to the world.

We utilize our comforts and freedom in exile to serve G-d better but we must never feel too attached to our culture and land.

We should yearn for the time when we will leave the exile forever and unite with our land, our nation, and G-d once again. Someday we will all be together in Jerusalem. May it be soon. © 2007 Rabbi B. Leff and aish.com

**RABBI ZEV LEFF**

## Outlooks & Insights

**“R**emember what the Lord, your G-d, did to Miriam on the way when you left Egypt." (Deuteronomy 24:9)

Almost all of Parshas Tazria and most of Parshas Metzora are concerned with the intricate laws of tzora'as. Tzora'as afflicted people as a consequence of having spoken lashon hara. This is hinted to in Parshas Ki Tetzei, where the Torah warns us to be careful with respect to the laws of tzora'as and immediately thereafter to remember Miriam's punishment in the desert for speaking lashon hara about her brother, Moses. Miriam was immediately afflicted with tzora'as and forced to leave the encampment for seven days.

It seems paradoxical that the Torah chose to admonish us not to speak about the faults and shortcomings of others by reminding us of Miriam's sin.

During the entire time Miriam was afflicted, the nation did not travel. The whole nation waited for her as a consequence of the merit she accrued by waiting to see what would happen to her three-month-old brother, Moses, when she placed him into the Nile in a basket (Talmud - Sotah 9b). Again we wonder: What benefit was it to Miriam to have the entire Jewish people delayed for her sake? Did that waiting not highlight the cause of her banishment? Would it not have been better for Miriam if the nation had proceeded, unaware of her sin?

The answer is that Miriam did not sin. Her intentions in speaking about Moses were completely well-intentioned, without any malice. She meant no

harm to her beloved brother; nor did she cause Moses any harm, or even ill-feeling. Despite this, she was stricken with tzora'as. Her disease was not a punishment, but rather the inevitable, natural result of lashon hara. Because she had not sinned, Moses did not pray for forgiveness for Miriam-only that she be healed.

The command to remember Miriam does not denigrate her, for she committed no intentional sin. But we do learn from that act of remembrance the devastating effect of lashon hara, even when spoken unintentionally and without malice. Just as it makes no difference if one swallows poison intentionally or unintentionally, so, too, lashon hara devastates us, even when spoken without deliberate malice.

To highlight the intrinsic devastation wrought by lashon hara, it had to be crystal clear that Miriam did not sin and that her intentions were in fact pure. Miriam exhibited her love for Moses when she waited anxiously to see what would happen to him. The waiting of the nation for her was a reminder of her earlier waiting and, at the same time, the proof that she had acted without malice towards Moses. As Maimonides writes (Tzora'as 16:10): "... Concerning this the Torah warns us to be careful with tzora'as and to remember what G-d did to Miriam, as if to say: "Contemplate what happened to Miriam the Prophetess when she spoke against her brother who was younger than her, whom she brought up on her lap and for whom she endangered herself when she saved him from the sea and whom she had no intention to harm. She erred only in comparing him to the other prophets, and [Moses] did not care about what she said because [he] was a very humble person-and still [she] was immediately punished with tzora'as."

There were two distinct aspects of the Holy Temple which atoned for lashon hara. The Talmud (Zevachim 88b) relates that both the incense and the me'il (the garment of the Kohen Gadol from which bells and pomegranate-like ornaments hung) atoned for lashon hara. The Gemara explains that the me'il atoned for the lashon hara spoken publicly, and incense for "hidden" lashon hara. The latter is difficult to understand, however, since we learn of the incense's ability to atone for the lashon hara from its use to stop the plague that broke out when the people blamed Moses and Aaron for the deaths of Korach and his entourage. That lashon hara was public.

Perhaps, then, the Talmud is referring to two aspects of the damage caused by lashon hara. According to this understanding, public lashon hara refers to the harm done to the person that it was spoken against. Hidden lashon hara refers to the spiritual damage to the speaker of the lashon hara himself, the destruction of his soul.

What, then, is that spiritual destruction, which is physically manifested by tzora'as? It is the power of speech that distinguishes man from all other creatures.

The faculty of speech enables man to fulfill his purpose in the universe. Through speech man attaches himself to his Creator by learning and teaching Torah; through speech man addresses his Creator in prayer; through speech man crystallizes his thoughts, which in turn leads to action, as it says (Deut. 30:14), "for this Mitzvah is close to you in your mouth and heart to do it"; and finally, it is speech that enables man to communicate with others to unite in the communal service of the Almighty.

When man uses his unique power of speech to unite the world in service of G-d, he realizes his potential as the pinnacle of Creation. The Hebrew word for tongue, lashon, is related to losh, the process of mixing solids and liquids together. The tongue takes the spiritual inner essence of the soul and expresses it in the physical realm-thereby mixing spiritual and physical together.

Utilizing the tongue for lashon hara, to degrade, to defile, to cause strife and dissension, divests man of the very essence of his distinction as a human being by corrupting his most exalted faculty. The Jerusalem Talmud says that there are three sins for which a person is punished in this world and in the next-immorality, murder and idolatry-and lashon hara is equal to all three. These three sins represent the destruction of one's physical, emotional and spiritual self. Lashon hara equals them all. For the totality of the human being is destroyed by the corruption of his ultimate distinction, his speech. Thus, one afflicted with lashon hara defiles like a corpse. He is banished from society and mourns himself, for the essence of his being has been negated.

At the conclusion of the Amidah we beseech: "My G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully." After we have used our mouths for communicating with our Creator, we can fully appreciate the calamity inherent in corrupting that same wondrous instrument by using it for lashon hara.

The laws of childbirth precede the laws of tzora'as. Man has the ability to be a partner in Creation, to create a new being, or he can take his own body and divest it of its Divine essence by speaking lashon hara. Both extremes are presented. The choice is ours. The literal intent of the words of the Sages is that life and death are in the hands of the tongue. © 2007 Rabbi Z. Leff & aish.com

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**here are many who believe that Jewish law links a menstruating woman (niddah) with that which is dirty. This because the word tameh, associated with the niddah (see for example this week's portion Leviticus 12:2) is often defined as unclean.

If this were true, taharah, the antonym of tumah, would by implication be synonymous with

cleanliness. However, Phinehas ben Jair, in a famous comment which was to contribute the outline of Rabbi Moses Hayyim Luzzatto's "The Path of the Just" (Mesillat Yesharim), said that Torah, precision, zeal, cleanliness, restraint, taharah, saintliness, meekness, and fear of sin in that order lead to holiness. We learn from this statement that cleanliness and taharah are two distinct categories. So too, is physical uncleanness not synonymous with tumah.

The truth is that there are several terms in the Torah that have no suitable English equivalent. Such terms should not be translated. Leaving them in the original Hebrew makes the reader understand that a more detailed analysis of the word is necessary. Tumah is one of those words that cannot be perfectly translated and requires a deeper analysis.

Rav Ahron Soloveichik suggested that the real meaning of tumah might be derived from the verse in Psalms, which says: "The fear of the Lord is tehorah, enduring forever." (Psalms 19:10) Taharah therefore means that which is everlasting and never deteriorates. Tumah, the antithesis of taharah, stands for mortality or finitude, that which withers away.

A dead body is considered a primary source of tumah, for it represents decay in the highest sense not only because the corpse itself is in the process of decaying, but also because the living individual who comes into contact with the corpse usually suffers emotionally and endures a form of spiritual fragmentation, a counterpart of the corpse's physical falling away.

The metzora (leper) whose body is encompassed with skin lesions is also considered in a state of tumah. The leper is tameh because he is slowly disintegrating, while those who associate with him decline emotionally as they observe the wasting away of another human being. The ba'al keri (one who has had a seminal issue) and the niddah may fall into the same framework for they represent in the strictest sense the loss of potential life.

No wonder, then, the process of purification involves immersion in the mikveh, a natural body of water. This because, water is the clearest symbol of life-an appropriate spiritual antidote to tumah, which is nothing, less than what Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik described as "the whisper of death."

As much as we have tried to teach the real meaning of tumat niddah, there are still so many who believe that halakhah links niddah with that which is dirty. This myth must be shattered, a myth that has made it emotionally difficult for many women to accept the laws of family purity. An appropriate understanding of niddah may lead to a greater observance of these important laws. © 2007 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

This coming Monday evening and Tuesday we will be celebrating the newly created festival of Yom Ha'atzmaut or Israeli Independence Day. Although Religious-Zionist and secular Israel join together in their celebration of the day marking Ben Gurion's declaration of the Independent State of Israel on the 5th day of the Hebrew month of Iyar, May 14, 1948, the Haredi (ultra Orthodox) population of Israel does not mark this day as a special day of celebration. What are the issues which are responsible for this religious division within the Israeli population?

The first question to be asked is whether the Jewish community in modern times has the power to create a new festival. Although many ultra Orthodox religious leaders will say that without a prophet or Sanhedrin (Religious Court) we lack the judicial ability to create a new festival, major religious authorities such as the Hatam Sofer and the Pri Hadash to Yoreh Deah 233 resoundingly maintain that we do have this power - especially when the Jewish people had been saved from death in the Land of Israel. Even as far as the recitation of Hallel - special psalms of praise which punctuate every Jewish Festival - the Talmud records that "the prophets at the time of the splitting of the Reed Sea enacted that whenever the Israelites face a difficult and dangerous experience and are redeemed, they must recite the Hallel." (B.T. Pesahim 117 a)

Herein however resides the fly in the ointment. Rashi explains the Talmudic passage providing for the enactment of Hallel "As, for example, in the instance of Hanukkah". Indeed, we recite the Hallel psalms of praise for all the eight days of Hanukkah. The first day - the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev - marking the miraculous military victory of the few righteous Hasmoneans against the many wicked Greek- Syrians. But such a victory never happened on the fifth day of the Hebrew month of Iyar. Much the opposite: on Nov 29, 1947 the United Nations proposed a Partition Plan which would give the Palestinians 80% of the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Israelis 20%. The Israelis accepted the plan whereas the Arab world did not and immediately attacked the Israeli Yishuv. This war known as Israel's War of Independence became a life and death struggle. In the midst of the war, indeed just one day after Gush Etzion fell and most of its defenders were massacred, the British Mandate controlling the Middle East ended and the window of opportunity for the provisional government of Israel opened up. That day was May 14th, Iyar 5, 1948 - and David Ben Gurion declared the Independent and Jewish State of Israel. But this was not a day of a victory of merit for Israel or even of a cease fire which would allow the Jews to live in peace, even temporarily. After Israel's declaration of Independence the fighting

became even more ferocious and the old city of Jerusalem fell to the Arabs. The cease fire only came many months later.

From this perspective, it is difficult to justify reciting Hallel on Yom Haatzmaut. Yom Yerushalayim, on the other hand, when we won a decisive military victory against the Arab invasion on June 5, 1967 and succeeded in liberating the holy city of Jerusalem, fits much better into the rubric of the passage in the Tractate Pesachim. By what right do we recite psalms of praise on the day of the declaration which is not linked to any military victory or Israeli redemption?

After having said this I proudly rule that Hallel is to be recited on Yom Haatzmaut with a blessing. I believe that it is critical that we realize that Hitler was waging a second world war against 2 enemies: the free world of the West and the Jews together with Judaism. Even a cursory reading of Mein-Kampf by Adolph Hitler reveals to what extent the Nazi madman saw the Jews and Judaism as its number one enemy. Nazi fascism saw physical might and power as belonging to the Aryan race, the super men of the universe. They looked at the Jews as a weak, slave nation who bequeathed to the world a slave morality and the fairy tale about a G-d that loved and protected the humble and the weak. The only evidence to counter Hitler's thesis was the very existence and survival of the Jewish people despite their weakness and statelessness for close to 2,000 years. And the Jews were G-d's witnesses! If the Jews still exist despite their weakness this must mean that the G-d who loves the weak also exists and that there is morality and ultimate justice, if not in this world then in the next. Hence for Hitler his most important task was to annihilate the last Jews and the last remnant of Judaism. Only then could he continue his life unafraid of any eventual punishment by a G-d who created every human being in His image.

The Holocaust was therefore a great war against the Jews. It was a tragic war, a costly war, a cruel and destructive war. WE lost 6 million innocent and sacred men, women and children as a result of that war. But nevertheless we won that war when Nazism was dethroned and Hitler committed suicide in his bunker and when Israel was declared a State. Dry - Boned muscle men arose from their graves and proudly walked on the land of the Independent State of Israel and it became clear that Israel emerged victorious and the Nazis were vanquished. The 5th of Iyar marks our victory and redemption from the cruel claws of the Nazis. It fits into the rubric of the Talmud and we must proudly recite Hallel.

An important postscript: The monument-memorial to the 6 million in Berlin Germany is a nameless grave site of 2,711 stones sculpted by the artist Eisenman in his stunning cemetery memorial. Why 2,711 stones? The artist claims it was merely arbitrary and happened to make sense artistically. In

Hitler's final bunker which became his grave site - only a stone's throw from the memorial - was remarkably found a Talmud tractate Pesachim which is the holiday of our redemption. The Talmud was presented to Rav Isaac Herzog of blessed memory, Chief Rabbi of Israel at the time of the establishment of the State. Why did Hitler bring the Talmud into the bunker? No one really knows, but it would seem that Hitler believed or hoped that he was burying the last Talmud in the world. The fact however is that following the holocaust there were 2 miracles: the establishment of the State of Israel and the explosion of Torah learning in the Jewish world. This is reflected especially in the popular study of the Daf Yomi, the study of the Talmud every day for 7 years after which time the student will have concluded the entire Talmud. The truth is that Hitler did not bury the Talmud, our all and eternal law; the Talmud buried Hitler. And remarkably enough there are 2,711 pages all together in the Babylonian Talmud! © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**



## Weekly Dvar

In this week's Parsha, Tazria, we're told about the discoloration (leprosy) that occurs when people, and sometimes even their property, get for speaking negatively about others (Lashon Hara). One interesting rule, however, is that even if it's blatantly obvious that one has leprosy, the laws pertaining to it do not apply until the Kohen (priest) declares it impure. Why would we need an 'official' to see and declare it if it's obvious what it is? Also, the Torah says that leprosy that's partially healed is considered as if it's clean (13:6). Why would a partial healing be adequate if there's still discoloration?

If we think about it, we can discover a great lesson from the Torah: the concept of having someone to go to for guidance. As Rabbi Twerski explains, showing your flaws to a Kohen should help you want to change them, because of the embarrassment. Another advantage is that if we have challenges that are hard for us to overcome, it would help if we talked to someone who might be able to guide us. In this case the expert was a Kohen, but if a suit of ours got dirty we would take it to professionals to clean, and we may even point out the stains. By the same token, we should treat our souls the same when cleansing ourselves of bad habits (both Halachic and personal), and a Rabbi happens to be the expert in the Biblical field. And the truth is that a partial healing is enough to purify the stain because it shows that there was effort to change. The lesson of the Kohen and the leprosy is just as our sages advise us in Pirkei Avot: find yourself a Rav (Rabbinical authority that you're comfortable with). In the end, we shouldn't be ashamed of our weaknesses unless we're doing nothing about them!  
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