

# Toras אש תורת אש Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

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

This prompts the obvious question: Why evil speech and not some other sin? Why should speaking be worse than, say, physical violence? There is an old English saying: “Sticks and stones may break my bones/but words will never harm me.” It is unpleasant to hear bad things said about you, but surely no more than that.

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Deot 7:2.

<sup>2</sup> Arachin 15b.

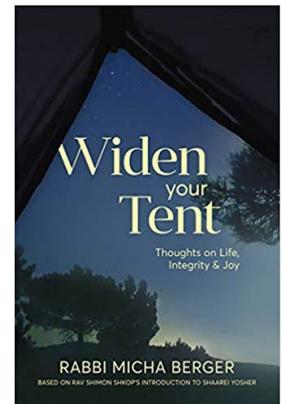
<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Arachin 15a.

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

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

When God sought to halt the plan of the people of



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<sup>5</sup> See Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct* (New York: William Morrow, 1994); Robin Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Guy Deutscher, *Through the Looking Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages* (New York: Metropolitan/Henry Holt, 2010).

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

So the first principle of language in Judaism is that it is creative. We create worlds with words. The second principle is no less fundamental. Abrahamic monotheism introduced into the world the idea of a God who transcends the universe, and who therefore cannot be identified with any phenomenon within the universe. God is invisible. Hence in Judaism all religious images and icons are a sign of idolatry.

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

The answer again is: in words. God spoke. He spoke to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses. At the revelation at Mount Sinai, as Moses reminded the Israelites, “The Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Deut. 4:12). In Judaism, words are the vehicle of revelation. The prophet is the man or woman who hears and speaks the word of God. That was the phenomenon that neither Spinoza nor Einstein could understand. They could accept the idea of a God who created heaven and earth, the force of forces and cause of causes, the originator of, as we call it

nowadays, the Big Bang, the God who was the architect of matter and the composer of order. God, Einstein famously said, “does not play dice with the universe.” Indeed, it is ultimately faith in the universe as the product of a single creative intelligence that underlies the scientific mindset from the outset.

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

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

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

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

It follows that to misuse or abuse language to sow suspicion and dissension is not just destructive. It is sacrilege. It takes something holy, the human ability

<sup>6</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, essay 2 in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

to communicate and thus join soul to soul, and use it for the lowest of purposes, to divide soul from soul and destroy the trust on which non-coercive relationships depend.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Never take language lightly, implies the Torah. For it was through language that God created the natural world, and through language that we create and sustain our social world. It is as essential to our survival as the air we breathe. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and*

<sup>8</sup> Yalkut Shimoni I:552.

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**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, "When you come into the Land of Canaan which I give to you as an inheritance and I shall give you the plague of leprosy in the houses of the land of your inheritance." (Leviticus 14:34) The disease known as leprosy has engendered dread in the hearts of people, especially in times gone by when it was apparently more widespread and exceedingly contagious. In biblical times, the priests (kohanim) would determine whether a skin discoloration or scab was indeed leprous – and, if so, the hapless leper would be rendered ritually impure and exiled from society. From the biblical religious perspective, this tzara'at emanated from a serious moral deficiency, generally identified as slander.

An especially problematic aspect of these laws of tzara'at is the fact that not only individuals but even walls of houses could become infected by this ritually impure discoloration. Do walls have minds, souls, consciences or moral choices which allow for punishment? And stranger still, the Bible describes the phenomenon of "leprosy of houses" in almost positive, gift-of-God terms:

"The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, "when you come into the Land of Canaan which I give to you as an inheritance and I shall give you the plague of leprosy in the houses of the land of your inheritance." (Leviticus 14:34)

How are we to understand this biblical reference to the "divine gift" of the leprous walls? And third, for individuals, the tzara'at malady is expressed as a white discoloration, whereas for walls, white spots are not at all problematic, the only thing they attest to is mold! Green and red are the dangerous colors for walls (Lev. 14:36,37). Why the difference?

Nahmanides, the twelfth-century commentary who is an especial champion of the unique importance of the Land of Israel for the people of Israel, sees the phenomenon of the leprous walls as an expression of the intensely concentrated moral sensitivity of our holy land: the sanctity of Israel, home of the Divine Presence (Shekhina), cannot abide within its boundaries a home in which slander is spoken. Hence the walls of such a house in Israel will naturally show the effects of words of gossip which can destroy lives.

Maimonides sees another benefit to the "leprosy of the homes" – an explicit warning to cease and desist from speaking slander: "This is a sign and a wonder to warn people against indulging in malicious speech (lashon hara). If they do recount slanderous tales, the walls of their homes will change; and if the inhabitants maintain their wickedness, the garments upon them will change" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of the

Impurity of Tzara'at 16:10).

Rashi suggests a practical application for the "gift of the leprous walls": "It was a happy tiding for them when the plague (of leprosy) came upon (their homes). This is because the Amorite Canaanites had hidden treasures of gold in the walls of their homes during the forty years when Israel was in the desert, and because of the leprous plagues the walls were taken apart and [the treasures] were found" (Rashi, Lev. 14:34).

I would suggest that Rashi's commentary may be given a figurative rather than a literal spin. The walls of a house represent a family, the family which inhabits that house; and every family has its own individual culture and climate, scents and sensitivities, tales and traditions. A house may also represent many generations of families who lived there; the values, faith commitments and lifestyles which animated those families and constituted their continuity. The sounds, smells and songs, the character, culture and commitments which are absorbed – and expressed – by the walls of a house, are indeed a treasure which is worthy of discovery and exploration. The walls of a home impart powerful lessons; hidden in those walls is a significant treasure-trove of memories and messages for the present and future generations. Perhaps it is for this reason that the nation of Israel is called the house of Israel throughout the Bible.

From this perspective we can now understand the biblical introduction to "house-leprosy." This hidden power of the walls is a present as well as a plague, a gift as well as a curse. Do the walls emit the fragrance of Shabbat halla baking in the oven or the smells of cheap liquor? Are the sounds which seep through the crevices sounds of Torah study, prayer and words of affection or are they experiences of tale-bearing, porn and anger? The good news inherent in the leprosy of the walls is the potency of family: the very same home environment which can be so injurious can also be exceedingly beneficial. It all depends upon the "culture of the table" which the family creates and which the walls absorb – and sometimes emit.

With this understanding, it is instructive to note the specific colorations – or discolorations – which render the walls ritually unclean: "And he (the kohen – priest) shall examine the leprous plague penetratingly embedded in the walls of the house, whether they are bright green or bright red..." (Lev. 14:37). Can it be that green is identified with money and materialism (yerukim in modern Hebrew, an apt description of American dollars) and red identified with blood and violence? A home which imparts materialistic goals as the ideal and/or insensitivity to the shedding of blood – remember that our sages compared slander or character assassination to the shedding of blood – is certainly deserving of the badge of impurity! And is not the Palestinian flag waved so ardently by suicide

bombers, red and green and white (white being the initial sign of leprosy).

And finally, Rashi suggested that there was an Amorite-Canaanite treasure which the inhabitants placed in the walls of their homes in Israel while the Israelites dallied in the desert rejecting the divine challenge of the conquest of Israel. Might not this interpretation be suggesting that the indigenous seven nations, as well as present-day Palestinians, do indeed have a treasure which they impart to the children through the walls of the houses? This treasure is the belief that the land is important, that the connection to the land is cardinal for every nation which claims a homeland and respects its past. The land must be important enough to fight and even die for, since it contains the seed of our eternity; only those committed to their past deserve to enjoy a blessed future.

I am certainly not suggesting terrorism against innocent citizens and nihilistic, Moloch-like suicide bombing, which perverts love of land into a rejection of life and destruction of fundamental humanistic values. The Torah declares the ritual impurity of Red, Green and White! But many Israeli post-Zionist leaders are forgetting the indelible linkage between a nation and its land as an expression of its commitment to eternal ideals and the continuity between its past and future. Tragically we all too often only begin to appreciate the importance of our homeland when the Palestinian suicide attackers threaten to take it away from us by their vicious attacks. But perhaps sacred lessons can even be learned from purveyors of impurity. ©2019 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

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

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

The Torah emphasizes to us the importance of being part of society and not to remain as an individual isolated from all others and self absorbed in one's own problems and disappointments. This is a very important lesson about life. It is especially important in a society

such as ours that has, to a great extent, turned inward and encourages people to think only about themselves and their personal welfare and desires.

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

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

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

That is what Maimonides meant when he said that one should go out into the desert and live alone rather than succumb to the values and behavior of an evil society. The dermatological disease described in the Torah may no longer be with us, however the causes for and the effect that it has on society generally, certainly are present in our time. We have to engage in acts of self-purification, and, if necessary, isolation in order to rehabilitate ourselves and society generally. ©2019 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**L**eprosy, the subject of our parsha this week, is traditionally associated with the sin of slander. Thus, there is a similarity between the Hebrew word for leprosy-metzora- and the Hebrew words for speaking evil about another-motze sheim ra. The Torah reminds us of the danger of bad speech.

The ability to speak has the capacity to raise a human being above the lower animal world. Hence, Rabbi Yehudah Halevi labels the human being as medaber, one who speaks. Speech is what sets the human being apart.

But, the greater the potential to do good, the greater the possibility for that potential to turn into evil.

Speech can raise one to the highest level, but if abused, it can sink us to the lowest depth.

Indeed, injurious speech has enormous ramifications. Although when we were kids, we would say "sticks and bones can break my bones, but names can never harm me," it is actually not true. Words and name-calling can actually hurt deeply. It also should be remembered that while a word is a word and a deed is a deed, words lead to deeds. Once a word has been said, it is almost impossible to take back, for a spoken word spreads to others in ways that can never be undone.

A rabbinic tale: A rabbi was once asked, what is the most expensive meat. He responded, "tongue." And the next day the rabbi was asked what is the least expensive meat. Here too he responded, "tongue." Such is the challenge of speech. One that the Torah reminds us about this week, and that we should all take to heart. ©2019 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 DAVID LEVINE**

## Level of Understanding

**E**retz Yisrael, the Land of Israel, has long been described as a land that is capable of reacting to the people who dwell within it. The Torah often speaks of the people's righteousness affecting the rainfall, the peace or lack thereof, and even the right to continue to live in the land by Hashem's decree. This week's parasha demonstrates another case which was dependent on judgment only when dwelling in the land.

The Torah says, "When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I will place a tzara'at affliction upon a house in the land of your possession, the one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the Kohein, saying, 'something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house.'" Here we see our fourth case of the affliction tzara'at as a continuation of the three mentioned last week: the body, the hair, and the clothing. According to the Sifra, this affliction only occurred once the B'nei Yisrael were settled in the land, apportioned within their permanent possessions. The Rambam explains that the Torah lists the four categories of tzara'at in reverse order as tzara'at will first occur on the house, then on the clothing, hair, and eventually on the body. He suggests that Hashem would first afflict the house and hopefully that would provide enough of a warning so that the person afflicted would not need the other punishments to change. The Kli Yakar explains that the affliction could not take place until they entered the land because tzara'at could not occur in a tent and the clothing that the people wore in the desert was holy as it never wore out and grew with them. HaRav Sorotzkin says that this is one of the reasons why Miriam's

tzara'at went immediately on her body without warning, as those warnings could not have occurred in the desert.

The Ramban explains that the spiritual nature of the land created the atmosphere in which tzara'at could exist. Tzara'at was not a typical affliction which could be treated by a doctor or cured by medicine. By its very nature, tzara'at was miraculous and spiritual. As we mentioned last week, only a Kohein was permitted to declare that the affliction was tzara'at and that the process of isolation and change had to begin. Only in a land where one could sense the holiness about him could an affliction like this take place. Only in a land which was beautiful in its holiness could a person who strayed from that holiness experience a loss of personal, physical beauty to himself and his possessions.

In last week's parasha, we discovered a number of different reasons for the affliction of tzara'at. There are several reasons given for the specific affliction in a house. Rashi quotes a Midrash which is found in Vayikra Rabbah which explains that the Canaanites hid their gold and silver in their houses so that the Jews would not find them. In this Midrash, Hashem placed the affliction in the house to enable the Jewish inhabitants to locate that treasure. This explanation is rather strange as this indicates a problem with the house and not the owner. Though it is true that the treasure would only be found should the owner be forced to take down the afflicted stones, it still appears unusual that this affliction would then lead to a reward. The Rambam saw this affliction as a punishment for the same aspects of selfish behavior and gossip as the other three cases of this disease. One example of this selfishness is described in Gemara Yoma. A selfish man refuses to lend an object to someone in need, claiming that he does not have such an object. When his house becomes afflicted, he must take his possessions out of the house, and it becomes clear to all that his selfish character caused him to lie about his possessions.

Our Rabbis discuss the root of this selfishness. It is not uncommon for a person to lose track of his place in this world. The more one possesses, the more one begins to believe that it is something that he has done which has caused his wealth. It is his skill in business or his acumen in his management of his investment portfolio which has resulted in his ultimate wealth. He tends to forget that it is Hashem who provides him with his livelihood and grants him that extra wealth to use as Hashem wishes. One is granted wealth only so that one may use it properly to further Hashem's ideals. When one understands this concept, one is no longer reluctant to give his full share of tzedakah, provide jobs for others in need, and support the efforts of the community to provide houses of worship and study. When one is so concerned with his

ownership of his possessions, he fails to remember why those possessions were permitted to him. The tzara'at on his house acts as a reminder of his need to see Hashem as his provider.

One additional problem does arise as we return to the Midrash about the gold and silver that is found in the walls of the house. There is an opinion in the Gemara that this phenomenon never occurred, much like the phenomenon of the Ben Sorer Umoreh, the rebellious son. If this never happened, why does the Torah give us this case together with the Midrash? What purpose does this serve to teach us? We must first understand that tzara'at in the house was a precursor to tzara'at on the body. When a person later sees what could be tzara'at on his body, he sends for a Kohein to make that determination. If this affliction is verified, he is sent out of the camp and is examined weekly to note any change in the tzara'at. He will not be readmitted into the camp until the tzara'at disappears and that will not happen unless he changes his life.

We saw last week that the one who becomes afflicted has broken one of several different laws, the most likely of which was lashon hara, gossip. This person will be sent out of the camp until he changes his behavior. But what will enable him to change? He feels inferior while at the same time superior to others. His insecurity leads to talking about others. Because of the tzara'at he is now isolated and unable to speak with anyone. This punishment will make him feel even more inferior. At some point he will realize that without feeling better about himself, he will never be able to return to the camp. He must look inside himself to find his true worth. Just as with the house, he must tear down the walls of his own ego and discover the gold and silver which is hidden inside of him. Everyone has this treasure within as he is created in the image of Hashem. Once that treasure is found, a person can be satisfied with his own worth and no longer be jealous of others. That discovery will end his desire to speak lashon hara.

From this idea we are able to see Hashem's true concept of punishment. Hashem shows us that He only punishes in order to reward later. This is not the vengeful Hashem that some describe but a warm and loving Hashem. May we grow to appreciate that any suffering we experience is meant to lead us to understand ourselves and Hashem better. May we learn to allow our suffering to bring us to that level of understanding. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine

**RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**T**he Torah states: "This shall be the law of the one stricken with tzora'as on the day of his purification, and he shall be brought to the Cohen" (Leviticus 14:2). Why does the Torah tell us that he will be

brought to the Cohen? Won't he come of his own accord? Rabbi Ibn Ezra, a 12th century commentator, explains that after the tzora'as clears up he will not want to bring the offerings that he is responsible to bring.

When a person has tzora'as, he will definitely claim that of course he will bring the necessary offerings when the tzora'as clears up. Once he is cured, he can easily forget his obligations. Now that nothing is pressing him, he will focus on other things and not on meeting his obligations. (It's kind of like not paying pledges after the person gets well...)

Some people find it difficult to meet their responsibilities. When they need favors from someone or want to impress someone, they might make many promises. When the time comes to keep their obligations, they do all they can to avoid meeting them. A person with integrity will derive pleasure from meeting his responsibilities and will not need others to coerce him to keep them. The more pleasure you feel when meeting your obligations, the more motivated you will be to meet them. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Immersion in the Mikvah

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**A**nyone or anything that has been defiled (Tamei), whether man or utensils (except for earthenware and foodstuff), may be immersed in the water that is gathered in the ground i.e. a Mikva, and then they become Tahor (spiritually clean). We find this law of immersion of one's body in a Mikva in the Mishna, however when this law appears in the Torah it refers to the washing of oneself (Varachatz) as in the case of a Leper, and cleaning (Vichibes) regarding immersion of defiled clothing, or washing or coming in contact with water with reference to the immersion of utensils. The Rishonim (Rabbis who lived from approximately the eleventh century until the fourteenth century) state that any time there is reference in the Torah to washing or cleaning the intent is to immerse in a Mikvah.

One who is required to immerse in a Mikva must recite the blessing "Al Hatvillah" (who has commanded us regarding immersion). The reason that we use the language "Al Hatvillah" and not "Litbol" (to immerse-which would indicate that immersion is an obligation) is because immersion in and of itself is not an obligation, for one can remain in a state of defilement, "Tumah" (Rishonim). As well, if one did not recite the blessing one still emerges spiritually clean (Tahor) after the immersion in the Mikvah (This is the view of the Geonim who are Rabbis who lived from approximately the sixth through the tenth century).

The edict by Ezra that a man who had a seminal emission had to also immerse in a Mikva, is no

longer applicable in our days (though there are views that state, that should a man desire to immerse in a Mikvah after a seminal emission he may do so and may even recite the blessing- for it is still a Mitzvah). Essentially, however, only women who have just given birth (Yoledet) or who has completed her menstrual cycle (Niddah) immerses in a Mikva and recites the appropriate blessing.

There are those who say that though all blessings are recited before the Mitzvah is performed (Over Lasiyatan), with regard to Mikvah this is done after the actual immersion. Thus even though a woman who is a Niddah or anyone who has other defilements may say a Bracha while they are Tammei (defiled), it is best that they first immerse and then say the blessing for it is better to recite the blessing when one is in a pure state. Others insist however, that the blessing must be recited before the Mitzvah. To fulfill the requirement of both these views, one can first immerse one time (thus the person is reciting the blessing when pure), and then recite the blessing and immerse a second time (which will fulfill the view of reciting the blessing before the action). ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

#### RABBI DOV KRAMER

## Taking a Closer Look

**"T**his shall be [the corpus of] law regarding one who has tzora'as" (Vayikra 14:2). The word "[the corpus of] law regarding" ("Toras"), appears 16 times in the Torah (and once more when it means "the corpus of law from"), and numerous additional times throughout Nach, but this is the only time where it is preceded by the word "shall be" ("tihiyeh"). Why does the Torah place this "corpus of law" in the future, especially when none of the others are?

Of the 17 times the word "Toras" is used in the Torah, four of them are said regarding the laws of "tzora'as" (13:59, 14:2, 14:32 and 14:57), plus one "Torah" (14:54) as well. Why are we told that "this is the corpus of law regarding tzora'as" so many times? Granted, the first is said regarding the laws of afflicted clothing, the second (our verse) introducing the process of an afflicted person becoming ritually cleansed, and the third specifically about the offerings brought by a poor person, so they can be said to be different "corpuses of law," but why consider them separate rather than combining them into one "corpus"? Besides, the fourth (and fifth) refer to everything, including the other three "corpuses," so why separate them before putting them all back together? [Malbim tells us what the (inclusive) word "Torah" generally comes to teach us, and what the (limiting) word "this" generally teaches us, but he doesn't specify what each of the five are specifically teaching us. He also addresses why the word "tihiyeh" is used.] Also, why are there two

“summations” (first “Torah” and then “Toras”) at the very end, rather than just one?

Finally, the order of the sections (or “corpuses”) seems a bit disjointed. First the laws regarding the “tzora’as” that afflicts the body is discussed (13:1-46), then that of the “tzora’as” that afflicts a garment (13:47-59), then back to the person whose body was afflicted, and how he becomes ritually cleansed (14:1-32), followed by the “tzora’as” that afflicts a house (14:33-53), including the “ritual cleansing” that parallels those of a person, and then the summation (14:54-57), which covers everything. Wouldn’t it make more sense to teach everything regarding the “tzora’as” that afflicts the body, including the “ritual cleansing,” before moving on to the other types? Why does the affliction of a garment “interrupt” the two aspects of a bodily affliction? And if the process of ritual cleansing is going to be separated from the type of affliction one is being cleansed from, shouldn’t the third type of “tzora’as,” that of a structure, be inserted first too, rather than putting it all by itself at the end? What should we make of the way the laws of “tzora’as” are taught and how they are presented?

Last week (<http://tinyurl.com/hffaj3e>) I suggested that the laws of “tzora’as,” which are part of a larger group of “impurity laws” that also includes the ritual impurity caused by animal carcasses (11:1-47), by childbirth (12:1-8) and via bodily emissions (15:1-33), were taught to Aharon and his sons during their seven-day training period (see 8:33-35, see also Sh’mos 29:35-37), which led up to the “Eighth Day” (Vayikra 9:1), the Mishkan’s first day of operation. Aharon and his sons were not allowed to leave the Mishkan complex the entire week (8:33), during which time they were taught the laws and details of the offerings to be brought in the Mishkan, and were trained in how to bring them (etc.). It makes sense for the laws of ritual impurity to be taught then as well, since they are quite complex (especially those of “tzora’as”), and they all needed to be known before the “Eighth Day” in order to prevent the Mishkan from becoming ritually impure. Well, almost all of them.

The “tzora’as” that afflicts houses wouldn’t become relevant until the nation reached the Promised Land (14:34), so although an integral part of the corpus of “tzora’as” law, it didn’t need to be taught until they were almost there. And, because “ritual cleansing” from “tzora’as” would not become relevant until the “tzora’as” healed (even the type that doesn’t need a week or two before it can be identified), only the ability to properly identify “tzora’as” had to be successfully taught right away, not how to become ritually cleansed from it. (That could be taught, if needed, on the “Eighth Day” itself.) With these factors in place, let’s reexamine the structure of the “tzora’as laws.”

The laws of “tzora’as” contain 11 paragraphs, taught to Moshe in three separate communications. [In contrast, there are three paragraphs regarding animals

but only one communication (11:1), one paragraph in the one communication regarding childbirth (12:1), and four paragraphs in the one communication regarding bodily emissions (15:1).] The first “tzora’as” communication (13:1) covers skin “tzora’as” and the “tzora’as” of a garment, both of which had to be known as soon as the Mishkan was up and running. The second (14:1) covers the purification process for a person afflicted with “tzora’as,” which wasn’t needed as soon as the Mishkan was operating, and could have been taught afterwards, if needed. [Although the purification of a garment afflicted with “tzora’as” is included in the first communication, since washing it and seeing what impact it had is part of the process of identifying whether the garment still has “tzora’as” (13:54-57), while also being part of the purification process, the entire purification process was taught together with it.] The third communication (14:33) covers structural “tzora’as.” It would follow, then, that these three sub-sections were told to Moshe separately, who taught them to Aharon and his sons on three separate occasions.

First, Moshe was told to teach those laws that had to be known right away. If they didn’t attain a full grasp of these laws, the other laws could wait; they had to be able to properly diagnose skin “tzora’as” and the “tzora’as” on a garment immediately. Since this was a separate “lesson,” and they might have been taught (or reviewed) other “laws of ritual impurity” before returning to the next part of the “tzora’as” curriculum, this lesson ended with a summation that “this is the law of “tzora’as” pertaining to a garment” (13:59).

When it became clear that they were ready for the next lesson, and could cover the material during these seven days, there was another divine communication, this one regarding the purification of a person who had “tzora’as,” and introduced as such. However, since this lesson would not be relevant right away (only after a person was diagnosed with “tzora’as,” and the “tzora’as” healed), it is not only introduced by saying “this is the law pertaining to someone who is ready to be purified from “tzora’as” (14:1), but that this “shall be” the law, in the future, i.e. when it becomes relevant. After this lesson was complete, another summation was made (14:32), since there was no guarantee that the third lesson, which wouldn’t become relevant until they entered the Promised Land, would be taught during this week of training (and learning). [As a matter of fact, we don’t know for sure that it was.] Once the third section was taught, though, and the entire curriculum was complete, the final summation is made (14:54-57), with the double-summation indicating that not only is this part of the curriculum done, but the entire syllabus has now been covered. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

