

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

At the risk of disclosing a spoiler, I would like to begin this week's Covenant & Conversation by discussing the 2019 film *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*. Tom Hanks plays the beloved American children's television producer/presenter Mister Rogers, a legendary figure to several generations of young Americans, famous for his musical invitation, "Won't You Be My Neighbor?"

What makes the film unusual is that it is an unabashed celebration of the power of human goodness to heal broken hearts. Today such straightforward moral messages tend to be confined to children's films (some of them, as it happens, works of genius). Such is the power and subtlety of the film, however, that one is not tempted to dismiss it as simplistic or naive.

The plot is based on a true story. A magazine had decided to run a series of short profiles around the theme of heroes. It assigned one of its most gifted journalists to write the vignette about Fred Rogers. The journalist was, however, a troubled soul. He had a badly broken relationship with his father. The two had physically fought at his sister's wedding. The father sought reconciliation, but the journalist refused even to see him.

The jagged edges of his character showed in his journalism. Everything he wrote had a critical undercurrent as if he relished destroying the images of the people he had come to portray. Given his reputation, he wondered why the children's television star had agreed to be interviewed by him. Had Rogers not read any of his writings? Did he not know the obvious risk that the profile would be negative, perhaps devastatingly so? It turned out that not only had Rogers read every article of his that he could get hold of; he was also the only figure who had agreed to be interviewed by him. All the other "heroes" had turned him down.

The journalist goes to meet Rogers, first sitting through the production of an episode of his show, complete with puppets, toy trains and a miniature townscape. It is a moment ripe for big-city cynicism. Yet Rogers, when they meet and talk, defies any conventional stereotype. He turns the questions away from himself and toward the journalist. Almost

immediately sensing the core of unhappiness within him, he then turns every negative question into a positive affirmation, and exudes the calmness and quiet, the listening silence, that allows and encourages the journalist to talk about himself.

It is a remarkable experience to watch as Hanks' gentleness, immovable even under pressure, slowly allows the journalist -- who had, after all, merely come to write a 400 word profile -- to acknowledge his own failings vis--vis his father and to give him the emotional strength to forgive him and be reconciled to him in the limited time before he died. Here is a fragment of their conversation that will give you a feel for the tone of the relationship:

Journalist: You love people like me.

Fred Rogers: What are people like you? I've never met anyone like you in my entire life.

Journalist: Broken people.

Fred Rogers: I don't think you are broken. I know you are a man of conviction. A person who knows the difference between what is wrong and what is right. Try to remember that your relationship with your father also helped to shape those parts. He helped you become what you are.

Note how in a few brief sentences, Rogers helps reframe the journalist's self-image, as well as his relationship with his father. The very argumentativeness that led him to fight with his father was something he owed to his father. The film reflects the true story of when the real Fred Rogers met the journalist Tom Junod. Junod, like his character 'Lloyd Vogel' in the film, came to mock but stayed to be inspired. He said about the experience, "What is grace? I'm not certain; all I know is that my heart felt like a spike, and then, in that room, it opened and felt like an umbrella." The film is, as one reviewer put it, "a perfectly pitched and played ode to goodness." (Ian Freer, *Empire*, 27 January 2020)

The point of this long introduction is that the film is a rare and compelling illustration of the power of speech to heal or harm. This, according to the Sages, is what Tazria and Metzora are about. Tsara'at, the skin condition whose diagnosis and purification form the heart of the parshiyot, was a punishment for lashon hara, evil speech, and the word metzora, for one suffering from the condition, was, they said, an abridgment of the phrase motzi shem ra, one who speaks slander. The key proof-text they brought was the

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives and various websites. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any synagogue or organization.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
(973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

case of Miriam who spoke badly about Moses, and was struck with tsara'at as a result (Num. 12). Moses alludes to this incident many years later, urging the Israelites to take it to heart: "Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam along the way after you came out of Egypt" (Deut. 24:9).

Judaism is, I have argued, a religion of words and silences, speaking and listening, communicating and attending. God created the universe by words -- "And He said... and there was" -- and we create the social universe by words, by the promises with which we bind ourselves to meet our obligations to others. God's revelation at Sinai was of words -- "You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a Voice" (Deut. 4:12). Every other ancient religion had its monuments of brick and stone; Jews, exiled, had only words, the Torah they carried with them wherever they went. The supreme mitzvah in Judaism is Shema Yisrael, "Listen, Israel." For God is invisible and we make no icons. We can't see God; we can't smell God; we can't touch God; we can't taste God. All we can do is listen in the hope of hearing God. In Judaism, listening is high religious art.

Or it should be. What Tom Hanks shows us in his portrayal of Fred Rogers is a man who is capable of attending to other people, listening to them, talking gently to them in a way that is powerfully affirming without for a moment being bland or assuming that all is well with the world or with them. The reason this is both interesting and important is that it is hard to know how to listen to God if we do not know how to listen to other people. And how can we expect God to listen to us if we are incapable of listening to others?

This entire issue of speech and its impact on people has become massively amplified by the spread of smartphones and social media and their impact, especially on young people and on the entire tone of the public conversation. Online abuse is the plague of our age. It has happened because of the ease and impersonality of communication. It gives rise to what has been called the disinhibition effect: people feel freer to be cruel and crude than they would be in a face-to-face situation. When you are in the physical presence of someone, it is hard to forget that the other is a living, breathing human being just as you are, with feelings

like yours and vulnerabilities like yours. But when you are not, all the poison within you can leak out, with sometimes devastating effects. The number of teenage suicides and attempted suicides has doubled in the past ten years, and most attribute the rise to effects of social media. Rarely have the laws of lashon hara been more timely or necessary.

A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood offers a fascinating commentary on an ancient debate in Judaism, one discussed by Maimonides in the sixth of his Eight Chapters, as to which is greater, the chassid, the saint, the person who is naturally good, or hamoshel be-nafsho, one who is not naturally saintly at all but who practices self-restraint and suppresses the negative elements in their character. It is precisely this question, whose answer is not obvious, that gives the film its edge.

The Rabbis said some severe things about lashon hara. It is worse than the three cardinal sins -- idolatry, adultery, and bloodshed -- combined. It kills three people: the one who speaks it, the one of whom it is spoken, and the one who receives it. (Arachin 16b) Joseph received the hatred of his brothers because he spoke negatively about some of them. The generation that left Egypt was denied the chance of entering the land because they spoke badly about it. One who speaks it is said to be like an atheist. (Arachin 15b)

I believe we need the laws of lashon hara now more than almost ever before. Social media is awash with hate. The language of politics has become ad hominem and vile. We seem to have forgotten the messages that Tazria and Metzora teach: that evil speech is a plague. It destroys relationships, rides roughshod over people's feelings, debases the public square, turns politics into a jousting match between competing egos and defiles all that is sacred about our common life. It need not be like this.

A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood shows how good speech can heal where evil speech harms. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**S**peak to the children of Israel saying, when a woman conceives (tazria) and gives birth to a male ... on the eighth day the child's foreskin shall be circumcised." (Leviticus 12:2-3) The Hebrew word "halacha" is the term used for Jewish law which is the constitution and bedrock of our nation; indeed, we became a nation at Sinai when we accepted the Divine covenantal laws of ritual, ethics and morality which are to educate and shape us into a "special treasure... a kingdom of priest-teachers and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6).

The verb of the root "hlch" means "walk"; progressing from one place to another, and not remaining static or stuck in one place, as in the biblical verses: "Walk before Me [hit'halech] and become whole-hearted" (Genesis 17: 1) and "You shall walk [ve'halachta] in [God's] pathways" (Deuteronomy 5: 33).

This is important since scientific discoveries and social norms are constantly evolving, and it is incumbent upon scholars to consider these changing realities when determining halachic norms, such as establishing time of death (no longer considered the cessation of the respiratory function, but rather now considered brain-stem death), which would allow for heart transplants.

For this reason, the Oral Law was never supposed to have been written down – for fear that it become ossified.

It was only because our lost sovereignty (70 CE), pursuant exile and almost incessant persecution might have caused us to forget our sacred traditions that the Sages reluctantly agreed to commit the Oral Law to writing in the form of the Talmud, declaring, "It is time to do for the Lord, they must nullify the Torah law" not to record the Oral Law (Tmura 14b).

However, thanks to responsa literature, where sages respond to questions of Jewish law from Jews in every country in the globe, halacha has kept "in sync" with new conditions and new realities.

I would like to bring to your attention a groundbreaking responsum published by the great Talmudic luminary Rav Moshe Feinstein in 1961, regarding the verse which opens our Torah portion. Reactionary forces opposed his ideas, burnt his books and harassed his household, but he refused to recant.

The Hebrew word *tazria* in the above quote literally means "inseminated," *zera* being the Hebrew word for seed or sperm. The rabbi was asked whether a woman who had been artificially inseminated, after 10 years of a childless marriage because of her husband's infertility, could still maintain sexual relations with her husband. In other words: did the "new invention" of artificial insemination by a man who is not her husband constitute an act of adultery, which would make the woman forbidden to her husband?

Rav Moshe responded forthrightly and unequivocally: "It is clear that in the absence of an act of sexual intimacy, a woman cannot be forbidden to her husband or considered to be an unfaithful wife ...similarly, the child is kosher, because *mamzerut* (bastardy) can only occur by means of an act of sexual intimacy between a married woman and a man not her husband, not by means of sperm artificially inseminated." The sage added how important it is for us to understand the deep existential need a woman has for a child and how our "holy matriarchs" all yearned to bear children "and all women in the world are like them in this respect." If the mother does not know the identity

of the sperm donor, it would not prevent the later marriage of the child (lest he/she marry a sibling), since we go in accordance with the majority of people, who would not be siblings to this child (Igrot Moshe, Even HaEzer, siman 10).

This responsum opened the door for many single women who refuse to be promiscuous, or to take a marriage partner solely for the sake of having a child with him, but who desperately wish to have a child of their own and continue the Jewish narrative into the next generation. Especially given the obiter dictum Rav Moshe included, in which he explained the importance of having a child especially to a woman and specifically states that he would have allowed the woman to be artificially inseminated *ab initio* (l'hat'hila — since the woman asked her question after she had already been inseminated), this responsum has mitigated to a great extent the problem of female infertility. If a given woman does not have a properly functional ovum, her husband's sperm can artificially inseminate a healthy ovum, which can be implanted within the birth mother who will then carry the fetus until delivery; and if a woman is able to have her ovum fertilized by her husband's sperm but is unable to carry the fetus in her womb, a surrogate can carry the fetus until delivery.

The question is to be asked: Who then is the true mother, the one who provides the fertilized ovum or the one who carries the fetus to its actual birth? Depending on the response, we will know whether or not we must convert the baby if the true mother was not Jewish.

Rav Shlomo Goren, a former chief rabbi of Israel (and previously the IDF chief chaplain), provides the answer from our parsha's introductory text: "When a woman is 'inseminated (*tazria*) and gives birth..." The word "*tazria*" seems at first to be superfluous. Rav Goren explains that it took 4,000 years for us to understand that this word is informing us that the true biological mother is the one whose ovum was "inseminated." ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**W**hen a person will have in the skin of his flesh a spot... [like] the plague of *tzora'as*, he shall be brought to Aharon, the kohain, or to... the kohanim." (Vayikra 13:2) The very beginning of Parshas *Tazria* discusses a woman giving birth and how it affects her state of purity. R' Akiva Eiger z"l points out the connection between that and the laws of Kosher animals at the end of Parshas *Shmini*. He says that the two concepts are connected in that the parents' role in raising a holy child begins even before birth. The mother must be careful to consume only Kosher items because they have an effect on her unborn child, and he quotes Gemaros which provide anecdotal evidence.

The Torah then leaves the topic of childbirth and goes into the discussion of how one is identified as a Metzora, one who has been stricken by Heaven with the disease of tzara'as, often mistranslated as leprosy. What is the connection between these two?

Perhaps we can explain that the Torah began the Parsha of Tazria discussing life and how important the preparation for that life is. It then juxtaposes the concept of Metzora to show that one who acts in a way to make himself become a Metzora has upturned the lesson of the preciousness of life. A metzora did not value life; at least not someone else's.

The Gemara teaches that tzara'as comes to a person on account of seven sins: 1) Lashon Hara 2) murder 3) false oaths 4) immorality 5) arrogance 6) theft and 7) stinginess. In order for one to commit these sins, he must be lacking in the appreciation of others and even of Hashem. He doesn't consider the damage he causes or who is hurt. In this way, he degrades his own life and the purity it was supposed to be filled with. Failing to learn the lessons of birth, he replaces his life with death.

Chazal tell us (Nedarim 64b) that a metzora is one of four people considered like he is dead. R' Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that though he is alive and well (more or less) because he cannot help others, he is essentially dead. Because this person only thought of himself, he has abandoned the purpose of life, which is caring for others, and so, is dead.

The posuk from which the Gemara learns that the Metzora is considered dead comes from Bamidbar (12:12) when Aharon begged Moshe to pray that Miriam be healed from her tzara'as. He said, "Let her not be like a corpse which, when it emerges from its mother's womb, is missing half its flesh." Rashi and others explain that he was saying if Moshe didn't protect his sister, who was his own flesh, then it would be like part of his own body was missing. This underscores the connection that a metzora has failed to care for others.

In this time, when we have been quarantined and distanced from others, there are still many ways to do good for them. Let us find those opportunities and merit Hashem's healing for all of us.

One day a photographer entered Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim (MTJ) and set up a small ladder in the Bais Midrash from where he'd be able to take some pictures of the eminent Rosh Yeshiva, R' Moshe Feinstein z"l. As they began the shiur, this fellow moved to different spots to get a better shot of the holy sage.

Some of the students were upset and began to berate the fellow for disturbing them. But R' Moshe quickly put an end to that.

"Leave him alone," he said to his students. "He doesn't mean to disturb us. He is merely trying to do his job which is to get photos of me for whoever hired him." With that, R' Moshe looked at the man and gave him a

big smile for the camera, before returning to the shiur he was giving.

He understood that letting the man take his picture was an act of kindness to a fellow Jew. ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's Torah portion deals with a mysterious, enigmatic, and unknown physical disease.

Somehow this disease brings uncleanness and defilement to the human body and is manifested in blotches of color which appear on the skin of the person. It can also affect inanimate objects such as bricks and wood in the house and the fabric of clothing and textiles. All of this is mysterious, and we have no rational way to explain this nor do we understand its cause.

We see in our current situation with the coronavirus that there are things in the world that are not seen by us and not understood, but that can have a great effect upon our health, our wellbeing and even upon our lives. We also see that the Torah prescribed a type of quarantine when this disease struck. This was to prevent the sick person from communicating the disease to others. He had to announce the fact that he was afflicted and had to go into a sort of self-isolation until it passed. This is all too familiar to us today because we see it in front of our very own eyes.

Nevertheless, the Torah is not speaking about the coronavirus, but the message is clear. Again, there are things in the world that we do not see, that we cannot forecast, and that we do not understand. But these things have a strong influence upon our lives and upon society. The defilement, which physically is undetectable, nevertheless is present, is active and can be very injurious.

The Torah prescribed a process of purification for this situation which also, on the surface, is not very rational, but since the disease is not rational, so the cure for it may very well also be in the realm of something that we do not understand nor appreciate.

There were many ideas advanced as to the cause of this disease that the Torah describes. The most accepted idea is that it was caused by slanderous speech. We find that this disease affected kings, noblemen, scholars, and in the books of the prophets, it describes many great people who were afflicted. It was a non-discriminatory type of sickness, and again, we are witness to the fact that there are such viruses, so to speak, in the world that attack the great, the weak, the small and the strong, all at the same time.

Whatever the cause was, this specific affliction apparently no longer exists amongst us. But the Torah, which is eternal, continues to teach us about it, and we find an entire section in the Mishna which deals with it and details the Jewish law which applies to such

situations. This affliction may have morphed into different types of diseases, it may be that one particular cure is no longer applicable, but it certainly represents the fact that there must be a cure and that there must be a cause, and that these things do not happen randomly. We should not think that these afflictions descend upon us per chance without having some sort of cause.

Because of this, I am certain that after our current scourge passes, God willing in the very near future, we will be able to take a harder look at ourselves and our society, at our speech, our behavior and at our attitudes, one with another. If we do so and improve, then perhaps we will have discovered something about the disease itself and the cure that helped us escape with our lives. ©2020 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

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Tazria, one of the two portions we read this week, begins with the law "if a woman be delivered and bears a child." (Leviticus 12:2) The words "be delivered" seem redundant. Isn't "and bears a child" enough?

Rashi points out that "be delivered" refers to an early termination of pregnancy – "even if she gave birth to a shapeless mass, the laws of normal birth apply."

The similarity stands, even though Jewish law posits that life begins at birth – with the emergence of the head, or in case of breech, the majority of the body. In utero, the fetus does not have the status of life, but of potential life. The further along the gestation period, the greater potential life, reaching just before birth the status of "virtual" life. Thus, if at birth, only the mother or fetus can be saved, mother takes precedence – life comes before potential life.

Notwithstanding this difference, Rashi reminds us that a miscarriage in Jewish law has similarities to a live birth (impurity and sacrifices). The fetus may be potential life, but it is precious. For parents, it is emotionally, psychologically, their little boy or girl.

With this in mind, modern rituals have been developed to allow parents to mourn and grieve a stillborn or miscarriage. Indeed, parents are now encouraged to spend time and to lovingly hold their mis or stillborn.

One of the challenges of the laws of birthing is why, after delivering life, is a mother declared te'meah (impure)? While there are religio-legal and conceptual reasons explaining why at birth tumah sets in, our observation yields another possibility.

Perhaps, just perhaps, the tumah can also be seen as an expression of empathy by the birthing

mother for couples who are struggling to conceive or couples who have had losses before birth. Such an approach is in sync with Jewish ritual, most famously a wedding, where bride and groom, at the most joyous time, break a glass to recall the Temple's destruction, and lives shattered which need fixing.

In recent years, we've become much more sensitive to the challenges of pregnancy. Today, it has become a widespread custom to recite prayers in synagogue for couples struggling to conceive, and for halachic guidance to be given to single people who yearn to become parents. And today, it is common for a fetus to be buried, accompanied by a ceremony of spiritual, godly meaning. Today also, it is common practice for women after birth to recite a blessing of thanksgiving (Birkat Hagomel) as built into birth is potential danger for mother and child.

Parshat Tazria teaches that within the laws of birthing is the recognition that potential life lost is emotionally devastating, requiring "listening ears" who understand and friends and family and community who sympathize, empathize and love. ©2020 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 MORDECHAI WILLIG

TorahWeb

The Torah describes the process of purification from tzara'as, in which the Kohen must take birds, cedar wood, red wool (shni tola'as) and hyssop (aizov) (Vayikra 14:4). Rashi interprets (as translated by Artscroll), "Since afflictions come about because of malicious talk (lashon hara) which is an act of verbal twittering, birds that twitter and chirp constantly were required for purification. Because afflictions come as a result of haughtiness, what is the cure for his affliction? He should lower himself from his arrogance like a worm (tola'as), and like hyssop (an herb which does not grow tall)."

When tzara'as is diagnosed, the Kohen quarantines that person to one house (Rashi ibid 13:4); while he is impure, he must stay in in isolation (badad). Rashi explains, "since he caused a parting (a dispute) by speaking leshon hara, he, too, shall be set apart."

"This is the law of the metzora on the day of his purification" (ibid 14:2). The Medrash Raba (ibid 16:2) explains the etymology of metzora as coming from motzi shem ra, slandering someone falsely. While lashon hara is forbidden even if it is true, slander is much worse (Chofetz Chaim 1:1).

The Gemara (Shabbos 33a-b) teaches that askara, the most difficult death (Berachos 8a), is a punishment for lashon hara. The Gemara's source for this assertion is, "The mouth of the liars will be stopped, yisacheir", literally choked, which connotes askara (as

Rashi explains, a disease that chokes). This punishment is limited to liars, i.e. motzi shem ra (Maharsha).

All of Rabbi Akiva's students died because they did not honor one another. They all died a difficult death -- askara -- between Pesach and Shavuos (Yevamos 62b). The Maharal explains that honoring a friend is the essence of life, and leads to longevity (Megila 27b). It is literally the way of life (Brachos 28b), indicating that these students who died did not properly honor their friends.

Askara begins in the mouth and ends in the throat, the source of speech which defines human life. "Man became a living soul" (Bereishis 2:7) is rendered by Onkelos as, "a speaking soul." Askara is so called because the throat, the source of speech and life, is choked (niskar).

The Rambam (Hilchos Ta'aniyos 1:1-3) writes:

"[I]t is a Torah commandment to cry out to Hashem when a crisis besets the community...such as a plague (dever)...this is the path of teshuva, for when a crisis comes and they cry out to Hashem, all will know that because of their misdeeds they were punished. This prayer will cause the crisis to be removed from them. But if they will not cry out, but instead say, this is a natural occurrence which happened by chance, this is a path of cruelty which causes them to cling to their misdeeds and can add to even greater troubles. This is what the Torah states, "If you will not heed Me and will be indifferent, I will be indifferent to you, with a vengeance" (Vayikra 26:27,28). That is, when I bring a crisis upon you so that you repent, if you say it happened by chance, I will respond with vengeance to your indifference."

The COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis which affects all of mankind. The Rambam enjoins us to view it as a wake-up call to heartfelt tefila and teshuva. Nearly a century ago, the Chofetz Chaim warned that a natural disaster in the Far East was Hashem's call to Am Yisrael to repent. "I have destroyed nations...I thought that you would fear Me, that you would learn a lesson" (Tzefania 3:6,7). If the lesson is not learned, Am Yisrael itself will suffer (Letters of the Chofetz Chaim, no. 30).

The present crisis, which originated in the Far East, has taken many lives. We all live in fear, isolation and apart, many in quarantine. Many victims are torn from their families as they enter hospitals, dying alone, mostly because of the inability to breathe. While we are unable to identify a particular misdeed for which we should repent, it behooves us all, at all times, to avoid lashon hara and motzi shem ra associated with askara. This is especially timely in the week of Parshas Tazria-Metzora, when verbal (and other forms of gossip and) twittering is named as the primary cause of tzara'as, and during Sefira when Rabbi Akiva's students died of askara because of interpersonal failings.

Aharon HaKohen offered the ketores (incense) to atone for the people. He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped (Bamidbar 17:12,13). As such, it is recommended to recite Pitum Haketores daily, even for those who usually say it only on Shabbos after Mussaf (Pele Yoetz, Dever).

But what caused the plague in the first place? It was caused by the paradigmatic dispute which was not for the sake of Heaven (Avos 5:20), that of Korach and his entire company. This began as a family feud (Rashi, Bamidbar 16:1) over leadership, and fueled by rabble-rousers it ensnared multitudes, including great God fearing men (Ha'amek Davar).

More important than reciting Pitum Haketores is eliminating disputes, both in families and within and between communities. These two responses -- stopping lashon hara and seeking peace -- are indeed the answers to the question we all ask at times of rampant death: "Who is the person who desires life and who loves days of seeing good?" (Tehilim 34:14,15)

As in the case of Korach, disputes often result from hubris, as does tzara'as. To be purified from tzara'as, and to end a plague, one must lower himself from his arrogance, as Rashi teaches.

The COVID-19 crisis has not only led to difficult deaths and widespread illness. It has also crippled all of mankind, totally upending our way of life and our plans for the future. All of the amazing progress in medicine and technology is not a match for this microscopic coronavirus.

The obvious lesson is that Hashem, not mankind, controls the world. This should suffice to eliminate hubris from everyone. By lowering ourselves and by ceasing lashon hara and machlokes we can do our share to end this horrific plague. By heeding Hashem's call, as the Rambam and Chafetz Chaim warn, with heartfelt tefila and teshuva, may we soon be taken by Hashem, as in Nissan long ago, from sadness to happiness, from mourning to celebration, and from heavy darkness to great light. © 2020 Rabbi M. Willig and TorahWeb.org

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Yoledet

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Our portion this week begins with the obligation of a woman who gives birth (Yoledet) to offer two sacrifices—an Oleh and a Chatat. In essence this is really the obligation of the husband. Today, since the Holy Temple is not in existence and one cannot offer sacrifices, the husband is called to the Torah and given an Aliya. In addition the woman has the obligation to bring a thanksgiving offering (karban Todah) for just as a sick person who recovers must bring this sacrifice so also one who gives birth, when she recovers, must also offer a Karban Todah.

Today instead of the Karban Todah we say the Birkat Hagomel and on Yom Haazmaut (Israel Independence Day) we recite the Hallel in thanksgiving. When does the individual recite this blessing of "Ha'gomel"?

There are various opinions:

1. A Woman who just gave birth – would wait seven days before she would recite this blessing
2. The husband recites the blessing and uses the language "Shegemalech kol tov" (who has granted to you all good) and the wife would respond on hearing this blessing by saying Amen.
3. In the absence of his wife the husband would recite the blessing using the formula "shegamal l'ishti Kol Tuv" (who has granted my wife all good).
4. The wife fulfills her obligation when her husband is called to the Torah and recites the blessing "Barchu et Hashem Hamivorach"

There are also those who completely exempt the woman from reciting any blessing since the entire phenomenon of childbirth is an everyday miracle and occurrence and the essence of the blessing is really designed for one who sinned and is now well (hence the language Hagomel lechayavim tovot-who has granted one who is guilty) but a woman who gives birth is not guilty of purposely doing anything wrong-quite the contrary – she has just performed the Mitzva of childbirth.

All this relates to the individual. However as a group we are all obligated to give thanks to Almighty G-d on the rebirth of our nation Israel as we celebrate our independence. ©2019 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

This week's Parashot teach the laws of Tzara'at and describe the process of purification from that condition. Regarding this, R' Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l (1891-1982; Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav) teaches:

The Torah necessarily encompasses man's entire existence. Certainly the Torah relates to a normal, healthy person. The first part of the Book of Vayikra describes lofty spiritual levels -- the sacrifices and the dedication of the Mishkan. But, the Torah is meant to direct a person, and the life of a typical person includes times when he is not elevated. In Parashot Tazria and Metzora we meet the Jew when he is in an unhealthy state; specifically, when he is spiritually unhealthy.

The unique aspect of the human being is his power of speech. Thus, on the verse (Bereishit 2:7), "And G-d blew into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living being," Onkelos comments, "He became a speaking spirit." Man's speech reveals his thoughts. Man has within him a special soul, and that

soul's power reveals itself through speech. Also, man is a social creature, which is made possible by speech.

But, speech is a terrifying and horrible thing when used impurely. This is why Chazal speak so strongly of the evils of Lashon Ha'ra. When one corrupts the power of speech, he corrupts the essence of the human being.

Chief among all illnesses are those which come from unhealthy speech. All other faults stem from there. When man is worthy, he radiates the light of Torah on his surroundings. When he is unworthy, there will (G-d forbid) be Tzara'at in his house. (Ha'Torah Ha'go'ellet Vol. II p.134) ©2020 Rabbi L. Lam and torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the double parsha of Tazria-Metzora. "Adam ki yihyeh v'ohr b'sarow s'eis o sapachas o ba'heres (A man who will have on the skin of his flesh a white blemish that appears to be raised up {s'eis} or a blemish that is secondary {sapachas} in its whiteness or snow-white {ba'heres} spots) [13:2]." Most of these two parshios are devoted to the laws of leprosy -- the leprosy of people, of garments, of houses and the subsequent purification processes.

Many years ago I saw an advertisement in Reader's Digest for, yes, get this, the Reader's Digest Condensed Bible. The advertisement explained the pressing need for such a version of the Bible considering the fact that the uncondensed version "even contains many chapters devoted to leprosy!". "We're sorry G-d", I imagine the Reader's Digest editors told Him when He arrived with His first-draft manuscript in hand, "but we're going to have to overrule You on this one. With over 27 million copies in 19 languages bought monthly, we know how to make something readable! This is simply too long and boring!"

At a much earlier stage in my life I was looking and hoping for reasons why I wouldn't have to be too observant. One of the major 'obstacles in my path' were the thousands of seforim (Torah-related books) lining the walls of the Beis Medrash (study hall). I knew that these were volumes that had been written, probing the depths of every word of the Torah. Every seemingly extra word and letter were analyzed and each revealed teachings and profoundness. It was painfully obvious to me that such a work could not have been written by a man. Only a 'Toras Chaim', an instruction book for life, written by the Creator of that life, could contain such breadth and depth. Clearly, nothing could be gained by ignoring it and imagining that it wasn't there.

The Talmud [Megillah 14A] relates that, throughout the generations, the amount of prophets in Israel was double the amount of those who left Mitzraim. If so, based on what criterion were some prophecies written down and incorporated into the

Prophets and others not? Those prophecies that were needed and applicable to the later generations were preserved. The others were not.

If that is the case with the words of the prophets, how much more so when we're discussing the words of the Torah, the words dictated by Hashem Himself to Moshe. Therefore, with prayers for forgiveness from the fine editors of Reader's Digest, let us see what '90's-applicable' understandings can be gleaned from these "many chapters devoted to leprosy".

The leprosy discussed in the Torah has no connection to the physical ailment type of leprosy that we've heard of. It was a purely spiritual disorder coming as a result of a spiritual deficiency.

A parable is given of a person who approached a doctor with what appeared to be a small rash on his forehead. After applying the prescribed medication, the rash spread and covered his entire body. He angrily returned to the doctor, demanding an explanation. The doctor explained that the original forehead rash had been very deep and as such, could not be healed. The medication brought it out from this depth, causing it to spread thinly over the body as a curable rash.

The Hebrew word for leprosy -- *metzora* -- is actually a combination of two words -- *motzee ra* -- it brings out the evil. The leprosy signaled a deep inner decay in the person. The Doctor of all doctors brought this out to the surface of the body, enabling it to be 'healed'.

According to the *Kli Yakar*, the three main causes of leprosy were *lashon harah* (badmouthing others), haughtiness and an overly strong desire for materialism. Each of these causes are alluded to in the name of the different type of leprosy that each brought on. "Adam ki yihyeh v'ohr b'sarow (A man who will have on the skin of his flesh) s'eis o sapachas o ba'heres (s'eis or sapachas or ba'heres)." S'eis -- the 'raised' blemish -- came as a result of a person 'raising' himself up and acting in a haughty manner. Sapachas -- the secondary blemish -- came from an overinvolvement in that which really is secondary in importance. As the *Rambam* writes, all of a person's acquisitions such as wisdom, strength and uplifted character traits become an integral, inseparable part of the person. The exception to that is wealth. It is totally external to the person. Purely secondary. Baheres -- the snow-white spots -- are brought on by *lashon harah*. One who badmouths others causes them to turn white in embarrassment. In each case, the deep, inner decay is brought to the surface, affording the opportunity of correction by bringing a clear awareness of the malady.

Chaza"l teach us that one who is haughty is 'dochek raglay Shechina' -- he 'pushes' Hashem out of the world. He leaves no 'room' in this world for Hashem when he attaches too much importance to himself and to that which he has.

About one who speaks *lashon harah*, Hashem says: "he and I can't live together in the same world [Erchin 15B]". He is forgetting that Hashem cares very much about all of His children, even the one that he is badmouthing. The ill will that sparks the *lashon harah* is often caused by a feeling of injustice. Why does he have this and I don't? He is effectively cutting Hashem out of the equation. Cutting Him out of the world. Hashem didn't give the other person what he has... He took it and I want it! He too is attaching too much importance to himself and to that which he does or does not have.

One who has an overly strong desire for materialism is forgetting who he truly is and why he is here in this world. He too is attaching too much importance to his physical self and to that which he has.

The leprosy brings these inner decays to the surface and allows them to be healed by literally peeling away all of the external coverings of the person. It first afflicts the person's house. If he doesn't take heed and correct the root cause it moves on to his clothing. Ultimately, it afflicts the skin -- the covering of the person himself. See what really is important! Recognize that who you are is not determined by what you have...

We live in a time of prosperity and a great deal of conspicuous consumption. A Point to Ponder while living Life in These United States, or other such similar societies, is that the Torah's leprosy was a gift to help a person maintain perspective. We, who are no longer on the level to have such a direct communication from Hashem, must, using the full uncondensed version of Hashem's holy words, take this parsha of leprosy and apply it to our lives. ©2020 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

