

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Hannah Smith was a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl living in Lutterworth, Leicestershire. Bright and outgoing, she enjoyed an active social life and seemed to have an exciting future ahead of her. On the morning of 2 August 2013 Hannah was found hanged in her bedroom. She had committed suicide.

Seeking to unravel what had happened, her family soon discovered that she had been the target of anonymous abusive posts on a social network website. Hannah was a victim of the latest variant of the oldest story in human history: the use of words as weapons by those seeking to inflict pain. The new version is called cyber-bullying.

The Jewish phrase for this kind of behaviour is *lashon hara*, evil speech, speech about people that is negative and derogatory. It means, quite simply, speaking badly about people, and is a subset of the biblical prohibition against spreading gossip.¹

Despite the fact that it is not singled out in the Torah for a prohibition in its own right, the sages regarded it as one of the worst of all sins. They said, astonishingly, that it is as bad as the three cardinal sins – idolatry, murder and incest – combined. More significantly in the context of Hannah Smith they said it kills three people, the one who says it, the one he says it about, and the one who listens in.²

The connection with this week's parsha is straightforward. Tazria and Metsora, are about a condition called *tsara'at*, sometimes translated as leprosy. The commentators were puzzled as to what this condition is and why it should be given such prominence in the Torah. They concluded that it was precisely because it was a punishment for *lashon hara*, derogatory speech.

Evidence for this is the story of Miriam (Numbers 12: 1) who spoke slightly about her brother Moses "because of the Ethiopian wife he had taken." G-d himself felt bound to defend Moses' honour and as a punishment, turned Miriam leprosy. Moses prayed for G-d to heal her. G-d mitigated the punishment to seven days, but did not annul it entirely.

¹ Leviticus 19: 16.

² See Maimonides, Hilkhhot Deot 7: 3.

Clearly this was no minor matter, because Moses singles it out among the teachings he gives the next generation: "Remember what the Lord your G-d did to Miriam along the way after you came out of Egypt" (Deut. 24: 9, and see Ibn Ezra ad loc.).

Oddly enough Moses himself, according to the sages, had been briefly guilty of the same offence. At the burning bush when G-d challenged him to lead the people Moses replied, "They will not believe in me" (Ex. 4: 1). G-d then gave Moses three signs: water that turned to blood, a staff that became a snake, and his hand briefly turning leprosy. We find reference later in the narrative to water turning to blood and a staff turning into a serpent, but none to a hand that turns leprosy.

The sages, ever alert to the nuances of the biblical text, said that the hand that turned leprosy was not a sign but a punishment. Moses was being reprimanded for "casting doubts against the innocent" by saying that the Israelites would not believe in him. "They are believers the children of believers," said G-d according to the Talmud, "but in the end you will not believe."³

How dangerous *lashon hara* can be is illustrated by the story of Joseph and his brothers. The Torah says that he "brought an evil report" to his father about some of his brothers (Gen. 37: 2). This was not the only provocation that led his brothers to plot to kill him and eventually sell him as a slave. There were several other factors. But his derogatory gossip did not endear him to his siblings.

No less disastrous was the "evil report" (*dibah*: the Torah uses the same word as it does in the case of Joseph) brought back by the spies about the land of Canaan and its inhabitants (Num. 13: 32). Even after Moses' prayers to G-d for forgiveness, the report delayed entry in the land by almost forty years and condemned a whole generation to die in the wilderness.

Why is the Torah so severe about *lashon hara*, branding it as one of the worst of sins? Partly this has deep roots in the Jewish understanding of G-d and the human condition. Judaism is less a religion of holy people and holy places than it is a religion of holy words.

G-d created the universe by words: "And G-d said, Let there be ... and there was." G-d reveals himself in words. He spoke to the patriarchs and the prophets and at Mount Sinai to the whole nation. Our

³ Shabbat 97a.

very humanity has to do with our ability to use language. The creation of homo sapiens is described in the Torah thus: "Then the Lord G-d formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2: 7). The Targum renders the last phrase as "and the man became a *speaking* being." Language is life. Words are creative but also destructive. If good words are holy then evil words are a desecration.

One sign of how seriously Judaism takes this is the prayer we say at the end of every Amidah, at least three times a day: "My G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from deceitful speech. To those who curse me let my soul be silent; may my soul be to all like the dust." Having prayed to G-d at the beginning to "Open my lips so that my mouth may declare Your praise," we pray to Him at the end to help us close our lips so that we do not speak badly about others, nor react when others speak badly about us.

Despite everything, however – despite the Torah's prohibition of gossip, despite its stories about Joseph, Moses, Miriam and the spies, despite the unparalleled strictures against evil speech by the sages – *lashon hara* remained a problem throughout Jewish history and still does today. Every leader is subject to it. The sages said that when Moses left his tent early in the morning, people would say, "You see, he has had a row with his wife." If he left late they would say, "He is plotting against us."⁴

Anyone from CEO to parent to friend who seeks to be a leader has to confront the issue of *lashon hara*. Firstly he or she may have to put up with it as the price of any kind of achievement. Some people are envious. They gossip. They build themselves up by putting other people down. If you are in any kind of leadership position, you may have to live with the fact that behind your back – or even before your face – people will be critical, malicious, disdainful, vilifying and sometimes downright dishonest. This can be hard to bear. Having known many leaders in many fields I can testify to the fact that not all people in the public eye have a thick skin. Many of them are very sensitive and can find constant, unjust criticism deeply draining.

If you should ever suffer this, the best advice is given by Maimonides: "If a person is scrupulous in his conduct, gentle in his conversation, pleasant toward his fellow creatures, affable in manner when receiving them, not responding even when affronted, but showing courtesy to all, even to those who treat him with disdain ... such a person has sanctified G-d and about him Scripture says, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified (Isaiah 49:3)."⁵

That is in relation to *lashon hara* directed against yourself. As for the group as a whole, however, you should practise zero tolerance toward *lashon hara*.

Allowing people to speak badly about one another will eventually destroy the integrity of the group. Evil speech generates negative energies. Within the group it sows the seeds of distrust and envy. Directed outside the group it can lead to arrogance, self-righteousness, racism and prejudice, all of which are fatal to the moral credibility of any team. Whether or not you are the leader of such a group you must politely make it clear that you will have nothing to do with this kind of speech and that it has no place in your conversations.

Cyber-bullying is the latest manifestation of *lashon hara*. In general the Internet is the most effective distributor of hate-speech ever invented. Not only does it make targeted communication so easy, but it also bypasses the face-to-face encounter that can sometimes induce shame, sensitivity and self-control. Greek myth told the story of Gyges' ring that had the magical property of making whoever wore it invisible, so that he or she could get away with anything.⁶ Social media that enable people to post anonymous comments or adopt false identities are as near as anyone has yet come to inventing a Gyges' ring. That is what is so dangerous about it.

The story of Hannah Smith and the other teenage suicides is a tragic reminder of how right the sages were to reject the idea that "words can never harm me," and insist to the contrary that evil speech kills. Free speech is not speech that costs nothing. It is speech that respects the freedom and dignity of others. Forget this and free speech becomes very expensive indeed.

All of which helps us to understand the biblical idea of *tsara'at*. The peculiar property of *tsara'at* – whether as a skin disease, a discoloration of garments or mould on the walls of a house – is that it was immediately and conspicuously visible. People engage in *lashon hara* because, like wearers of Gyges' ring, they think they can get away with it. "It wasn't me. I never said it. I didn't mean it. I was misunderstood." The Torah is here telling us that malicious speech uttered in private is to be stigmatised in public and those who engage in it are to be openly shamed.

To put it at its simplest: as we behave to others so G-d behaves to us. Do not expect G-d to be kind to those who are unkind to their fellow humans. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (Lev.12:3).

This week's Torah reading is not only difficult because of its subject matter - the ritual status of a woman after she gives birth as well as the ritual impurity which devolves upon both men and

⁴ See Rashi to Deut. 1: 12.

⁵ Maimonides, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 5: 11.

⁶ See Plato, *The Republic*, book 2, 359a–360d.

women when semen or blood emerges from their bodies - but also in terms of the very strange order of the verses and the chapters.

The first question arises from a verse that seemingly has no connection to what precedes or follows it: after the Bible has informed us that when a woman bears a male child she will be ritually impure for seven days (Lev. 12:2), the following verse does not deal with the subsequent days of ritual purity, which she is allowed to enjoy no matter what her physical state may be. Instead, that comes two verses later (ibid. 12:4). In between, the Bible informs us "on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." Why place the law of circumcision in the very midst of the laws of a woman's status of purity upon her giving birth? It hardly seems to belong!

The second question deals with the order of the chapters. Chapter 12 deals with ritual purity and impurity as a result of childbirth, as we have seen. Chapter 15 deals with the different kinds of male seminal emissions and the different kinds of female blood emissions that are also connected to reproduction as a result of a sexual act between the couple. In the midst of these two Biblical discussions, which certainly involve ritual impurity and impurity surrounding reproduction, come two chapters 13 and 14 - which deal with tzara'at, usually translated as "leprosy" but that actually refers to a discoloration and degeneration of the skin which cause the individual to look like a walking corpse. Why bring in tzara'at to the midst of a discussion on reproduction?

In Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik's important work *Family Redeemed*, my revered teacher interprets the opening chapters of Genesis as a crucial lesson to humanity concerning the spiritual potential as well as the destructive danger of the sexual act. Indeed, the classical commentator Rashi understands the fruit of knowledge of good and evil as possessing human nature libido, eroticism and lust rather than the expression of love and the reproductive powers which were initially imbedded in human nature. Sigmund Freud sees the serpent as a phallic symbol and "eating" is often found in the Bible as a metaphor for engaging in sex. From this perspective, the sin of partaking of the forbidden fruit is the sin of sexual lust, which can often separate sex from the sacred institution of matrimony, from a natural expression of affection between two individuals who are committed to a shared life and to the establishment of a family.

It is fascinating that the punishments for eating the fruit are related to reproduction: "And to the woman [who initiated the transgression according to the Biblical account] He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain and travail in pregnancy and with pain shall you bring forth children.'" (Gen. 3:16). Even more to the point, the most fundamental penalty for having tasted of the forbidden fruit is death, which plagues men and woman alike: "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not

eat; for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17) The sexual act was meant to give not only unity and joy to the couple, but also to bestow continued life through the gift of reproduction.

I would argue that this is precisely why tzara'at, or the living death which it symbolizes, appears in the Bible in the midst of its discussion of reproduction and the normative processes of seminal emissions and menstrual blood which are necessary byproducts of the glory of reproduction. Tragically the life-force which is granted by G-d through the sexual organs can often degenerate into decay and death when those very sexual organs are misused.

I will also submit that this is precisely why the commandment of circumcision on the eighth day comes right before the Biblical establishment of a large number of days of purity (33 days after the birth of a male and 66 days after the birth of a female) no matter what blood may emerge from the woman's body. The much larger number of days attests to the great miracle of childbirth - which is always a heartbeat away from death for every anxious parent until the healthy baby emerges and omits its first cry. The birthing mother's days of ritual impurity counterbalance new life and the continuation of the family line, giving the greatest degree of satisfaction that a human being can ever experience. Such glories of reproduction are only possible if the male will learn to limit his sexual activity to being within the institution of marriage and will recognize the sanctity of sex as well as its pleasures. Placing the Divine mark upon the male sexual organ with the performance of the commandment of circumcision establishes this ideal of sanctity. The sacredness of the woman's body is similarly expressed when she immerses herself in a mikveh prior to resuming sexual relations with her husband each month and even makes a blessing to G-d while still unclothed within the ritual waters which symbolize life and birth and future.

Hence, the most meaningful blessing which I know is intoned during the marriage ceremony: "Blessed are You O Lord our G-d King of the Universe, who sanctifies his nation Israel by means of the nuptial canopy and the sanctity of marriage." ©2014 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

There 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 keris (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. ©2011 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the primary commandments in Judaism is to marry and have children. In the Garden of Eden we find Adam and Chava blessed by G-d and told to procreate and fill the world with people. For the Jewish people, having children has become a demographic necessity. Even though it is nearly seventy-five years since World II and the resultant Holocaust, the Jewish people has not as of yet made good on those immense losses in terms of population.

This is due to a lower than average birthrate amongst nonobservant Jews, a high rate of divorce, later-in-life marriages and an increasing population of singles. The ravages of assimilation and intermarriage also play a great part in the fact that Jews can currently hardly replace themselves, let alone make up for the deficit of population caused by the Holocaust.

The Torah places a high priority on children. It sees in children not only the physical continuity of the Jewish people but also a spiritual and heavenly connection that transcends one's life span. The rabbis commented regarding our father Jacob that as long as his descendants were alive and functioning then Jacob himself, so to speak, was also still alive.

Seeing one's self 'past the grave,' is one of the hallmarks of Judaism and of the Jewish people. The concept of the immortal soul is reinforced by being able to project one's self forward in time, living vicariously in the lives of one's descendants.

But, my friends, we all know that having and raising children is no easy task. And we also know that a parent remains a parent for one's entire life. I feel that this is one of the subtle messages conveyed at the beginning of this week's Torah reading. The Torah speaks of impurity, sacrifice and isolation of the mother after the birth of a child. This is the Torah's indication that these are factors that are unavoidable in the raising and nurturing of a child.

In all human society it is natural, indeed expected, for parents to do everything possible to give their children a good and healthy life. Those parents who do not somehow have that instinct within them are shunned in society and even liable to criminal punishment for neglect or abuse of their children. They are, even in our most open and liberal society, treated as being aberrant and cruel. The Torah, which is the book of practical human life, minces no words in describing the difficulties – impurity, sacrifice and separation from others – that having and raising children automatically brings to parents.

It is perhaps for this very reason that the Torah gave women such a strong maternal instinct and the desire to have children. For without that instinct, based only on the practicalities of life and the difficulties of raising children, Jewish demographics would, in a

practical sense, offer us no hope whatsoever for the future. The rabbis in Avot correctly stated that "the reward is directly commensurate with the effort and sacrifice." That is certainly true as far as children and generations and the Jewish future is concerned. ©2014 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 YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week's parsha, Tazria, begins with the laws of a woman who gave birth. Upon giving birth to a male, a woman is t'mayah {ritually impure} for a seven-day period. If she gave birth to a female, her period of impurity extends for fourteen days. The possukim {verses} then enumerate the sacrifices brought for a baby boy at the end of forty days and for a baby girl at the end of eighty days.

Many find difficulty with this concept of a woman becoming t'mayah after birth. They erroneously see this as an implication that birth is in some way 'dirty' and thereby brings on impurity. The fact that this period of impurity is double when a girl is born further exacerbates this perception.

In order to properly understand this we must gain a proper understanding of the concept of tum'ah {ritual impurity}.

Tum'ah does not seem to work according to the rules that we'd assume would apply. Animals have no tum'ah during their lifetime, human beings do. Furthermore, upon death a Jew has a greater level of tum'ah than a gentile.

The commentators explain that when an existing kedusha {holiness} departs, a vacuum is formed. That void which is created is immediately filled with tum'ah. The greater the level of kedusha, the greater the degree of tum'ah that will fill the void.

During one's lifetime, one has tremendous potential to bring 'tov' {good} and holiness to this world. While asleep, a person is incapable of performing any such acts. As a result, a 'ruach rah', a certain degree of tum'ah, sets in to fill the void formed by that lack of potential. Upon awakening, that potential kedusha returns. The ruach rah is pushed to the fingers and n'tilas yadayim {the ritual washing of the hands} is performed in order to remove that ruach rah.

The Talmud teaches that sleep is 1/60th of death. That temporary state of inability experienced during sleep becomes permanent at death. At that permanent state of inability the tum'ah sets in at a far greater level. The greater the potential for bringing tov into this world during life, the greater the vacuum that is created at death and filled with tum'ah. The corpse of a Jew therefore has a greater degree of tum'ah than that of a gentile.

Now lets see how this can be applied to the tum'ah of a woman after childbirth.

Our goal is to become as similar to Hashem as we can. "Just as He is compassionate, so too must you be compassionate..." Our life goal and project is to emulate Him to the best of our ability.

If we were to choose one word to best describe the unique character of Hashem, an excellent choice would be 'Creator.' At what point does a human being moves as close as possible to becoming a 'creator'? A woman at childbirth! At that time she is as 'G-d-like' as we ever can be. However, after birth she is no longer in that state. That kedusha is no longer there. A vacuum is formed--she becomes t'mayah.

Why is the period of tum'ah twice as long after a baby girl is born? Because she created a being which has the potential to create. She created a creator. However, once the birth had been completed, she is no longer in that state. The drop is that much more precipitous-the void is that much greater. She is t'mayah for twice as long.

People have feelings of emptiness and voids at different points of their lives. Perhaps these are the tangible stirrings of the vacuum created black of connection to holiness-the holiness for which we were created. May we merit to fill that void with the types of acts which make us most similar to our Creator. ©2014 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

There are three general categories of the affliction referred to as "tzora'as;" the skin condition that afflicts people, the fungus-like affliction that affects materials, and the fungus-like affliction that affects buildings. For each category there is a procedure to first identify whether "tzora'as" is present, a procedure to be followed if it has been confirmed to be "tzora'as," and a procedure to be followed after the "tzora'as" is no longer there (a purification process).

The "tzora'as" that affects the body is identified by a Kohain (Vayikra 13:3, etc.), who either affirms that it is "tzora'as," affirms that it is not, or sequesters the person who may have "tzora'as" for a week to see if it spreads (etc.). If it is determined to be "tzora'as," the afflicted must tear his clothing, keep his hair unkempt, keep the lower part of his face covered, and warn others of his condition (13:45), all the while living alone outside the community (13:46). After it has healed, there is a detailed purification process (14:1-32).

A garment (or other material) that might have "tzora'as" is also shown to a Kohain (13:49), who determines whether or not it is really "tzora'as" (13:50). Depending on what happened during the following week (13:51), the material is either burned (13:52) or washed and then sequestered for another week (13:53-54). After that second week, it is either burned (13:55), the

afflicted part cut away (13:56), or washed a second time (13:58; a second washing is done if the afflicted part was cut away too.) If it remained clean after the second washing, the material is considered "purified" (13:58).

An afflicted building is also identified by a Kohain (14:35-37), who only assesses the situation after the house is emptied (14:36). After a seven-day waiting period, the affliction is reassessed (14:38-39), and the Kohain instructs the homeowner how to proceed based on his reassessment (14:40, etc.). After the afflicted part of the building is removed (see 14:41-42), if it reappears, then the building is razed (14:43-45) and anyone who had entered the house during the week becomes defiled (14:46-47). If the affliction did not reappear, there is a purification process (14:48-53), after which the structure can once again be inhabited. Detailed stuff, for sure, but if you pay attention to how the details are presented (do you think I referenced the verses for my own health?), there is one aspect that stands out. Have you noticed it?

[Insert pause here to re-read the last three paragraphs more closely.]

The verses were all referenced in order, with one exception; the purification process for skin "tzora'as" is not taught immediately after its other details, but is interrupted by the details of the "tzora'as" that affects materials. The obvious question is why.

One possibility is based on the well known Midrashic explanation (Tosefta Nega'im 6:6, Vayikra Rabbah 17:4, Tanchuma Tazriya 10/14 and Metzora 3/12, Midrash HaGadol Vayikra 14:32), codified into law by Rambam (Hilchos Tumas Tzora'as 16:10, where he says "tzora'as is not part of the world's normal operation, but a sign and wonderment"), that one who sins ("loshon hara" is specified, but "tzora'as" is attributed to numerous other sins as well) is first punished by having his house afflicted; if he repents, fine, but if not, his clothing becomes afflicted; if he repents then, fine, but if not, he is then punished by his body being afflicted. This progression, though, is in the reverse order of how it appears in the Torah. [Maharzo on Vayikra Rabbah quotes one explanation as to why it is written in reverse order; a seemingly obvious explanation is that it follows the laws of another case of the impurity of the body, one who gives birth (Vayikra 12:2-5), and its purification process (12:6-8). Therefore, when discussing the different kinds of "tzora'as," first the kind that afflicts the body is discussed before moving on to the other types.] It is possible that the details of the "tzora'as" of materials is taught smack in the middle of the details of the skin "tzora'as" in order to draw attention to the fact that things are being presented out of order. Nevertheless, there is likely more to it than that.

In order to become purified from "tzora'as," the cause of the "tzora'as," the sin, has to be rectified. If it got to the point of skin "tzora'as," the sinner had already experienced the other types of "tzora'as," yet had not

repented. In order to become purified from the "tzora'as" afflicting his body, the skin "tzora'as" must have healed, meaning that repentance was now accomplished. However, it had only been accomplished after failing to repent after his house was afflicted, which means that his house had already been razed, and after not having repented despite his garment becoming afflicted, which means that his garment had already been destroyed by a biblically-mandated fire. Now that his body was afflicted, though, he finally got the message and repented. What does this repentance include? Was it only regarding the sin that started the process, or was he now also required to repent for not having gotten the message earlier? By describing the full process of the "tzora'as" of the garment (which came after a house affliction) before discussing the purification process after skin "tzora'as," the Torah is teaching us that part of the necessary repentance after being afflicted with this "tzora'as" is repenting for not having repented after the earlier "tzora'as." ©2014 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah which we read in conjunction with Parshas Hachodesh portrays the upcoming month of Nissan in a brilliant light. It begins with an elaborate description of the special sacrifices which will introduce the Messianic era. The prophet Yechezkel focuses on the dedication of the third Bais Hamikdash and says, "On the first day of the first month (Nissan) take a perfect bullock and purify the Bais Hamikdash." (45:18) The Radak (ad loc.) notes that the Jewish nation will return to Eretz Yisroel long before this. During that time most of the construction of the Bais Hamikdash will be completed leaving only final stages for the month of Nissan. Radak suggests that the inaugural services will begin seven days prior to the month of Nissan and will conclude on Rosh Chodesh itself. He offers with this an interpretation to the classic saying of Chazal "In Nissan we were redeemed and in Nissan we are destined to be redeemed." These words, in his opinion, refer to the events of our Haftorah wherein we are informed that the service in the Bais Hamikdash will begin in the month of Nissan.

As we follow these dates closely, we discover a striking similarity between the dedication of the final Bais Hamikdash and of the Mishkan. Historically speaking, each of them revolves around the month of Nissan. In fact, as we have discovered, they are both completed on the exact same date, Rosh Chodesh Nissan. But this specific date reveals a more meaningful dimension to these dedications. The month of Nissan, as we know, has special significance to the Jewish people; it marks our redemption from Egyptian bondage. In truth, this redemption process began on the first day of Nissan. Because, as we discover in this

week's Maftir reading, Hashem began preparing the Jewish people for their redemption on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. All of this indicates a direct corollary between the Jewish people's redemption and the erection of the Sanctuary and the final Bais Hamikdash. Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the date which introduced our redemption and afterwards our service in the Mishkan will ultimately introduce the service of the final Bais Hamikdash.

In search for an understanding of this, we refer to Nachmanides' insightful overview to Sefer Shmos. In essence, the Sefer of Shmos spans the Jewish people's exile and redemption. It begins with the descent of Yaakov and his household to Egypt and concludes with the exodus of our entire nation. Yet, almost half of the sefer is devoted to the intricacies of the Sanctuary, something seemingly unrelated to redemption! Nachmanides explains that the Jewish redemption extended far beyond the physical boundaries of Egypt. Before they left the land of Israel, Yaakov and his sons enjoyed a close relationship with Hashem. The devotion of the Patriarchs had produced such an intense level of sanctity that Hashem's presence was commonplace amongst them. However with their descent to Egypt, this experience faded away and, to some degree, distance developed between themselves and Hashem. Over the hundreds of years in Egypt, this distance grew and they eventually lost all association with Him. Nachmanides explains that even after their liberation from Egyptian bondage, scars of exile remained deeply imprinted on them. Having left Egypt, they began rebuilding their relationship with Hashem and prepared for a long journey homeward to Him. Finally, with the erection of the Sanctuary, they reached their ultimate destiny and reunited with Hashem. The Sanctuary created a tangible experience of Hashem's presence amongst them, the clearest indication of His reunification with them. With this final development, the Jewish people's redemption was complete. They now returned to the status of the Patriarchs, and were totally bound to their Creator. All scars of their exile disappeared and they could now, enjoy the closest relationship with their beloved, Hashem.

This perspective is best reflected in the words of Chazal in P'sikta Rabsi. Our Chazal inform us that, in reality, all the segments of the Sanctuary were already completed in the month of Kislev. However, Hashem waited until Nissan which is called "the month of the Patriarchs", for the erection and inauguration of the Mishkan. With the insight of Nachmanides we can appreciate the message of this P'sikta. As stated, the erection of the Sanctuary represented the completion of our Jewish redemption, their reunification with Hashem. In fact, this unification was so intense that it was tantamount to the glorious relationship of the Patriarchs and Hashem. In essence this present Jewish status reflected that of the Patriarchs in whose merit this relationship had been reinstated. It was therefore only

proper to wait until Nissan for the dedication of the Sanctuary. Nissan which was the month of the Patriarchs was reserved for this dedication, because it reflected the Jewish people's parallel level to the Patriarchs themselves.

In this week's Haftorah, we discover that this concept will continue into the Messianic era and the inauguration of the final Bais Hamikdash. Our ultimate redemption, as in our previous ones, will not be considered complete until we merit the Divine Presence in our midst. Even after our return to Eretz Yisroel, which will transpire long before Nissan, we will continue to bear the scar tissue of thousands of years of exile. Only after Hashem returns to us resting His presence amongst us will we truly be redeemed. This magnificent revelation will, quite obviously, occur in the month of Nissan. Our final redemption which reflects Hashem's return to His people will join the ranks of our redemptions and be introduced on that glorious day, Rosh Chodesh Nissan.

May we learn from them to totally subjugate ourselves to our Creator, thereby meriting the final and total destruction of Amalek and his followers. ©2014 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Sounds of Solitude

There is a fascinating paradox that relates to the laws of tzora'as, the spiritual malady, a skin discoloration that affects those who gossip. On one hand, only a kohen can either pronounce a state of impurity or purity. On the other hand, the afflicted man is in control of his own destiny. The Gemarah tells us that if, for example, the afflicted man removes the negah, whether it is hair or skin, then he is no longer tamei. So this affliction, which is purely spiritual in nature, a heavenly exhortation to repent from nattering ways, is basically toothless. If the man wills it, he can refuse to go to the kohen and not be declared tamei. And if he so desires, he can even remove the negah before anyone declares its potency.

Another amazing dimension is applicable after the afflicted man is declared tamei. The Torah tells us "that he is sent out of the camp, where he sits in solitude" (Leviticus 13:46).

His departure from the camp of Israelites is surely not due to a contagious nature of the negah. After all, if that were the case, he would be sent away way even before the kohen's declaration of tumah.

So why send the man to confinement where no one will monitor his reaction to the negah on his being, a place where he could remove the negah, or adulterate its appearance? Why not have him locked in a cell under the supervision of a guard who would insure the integrity of the purification process?

In the early 1900s, a simple religious Russian Jew decided that he could no longer stand the Czar's

persecution. He would leave Russia to join his son who had settled in Houston, Texas, some twenty years earlier. The son, who had totally assimilated and was a successful oilman, was thrown into a panic. "Of course, you are welcome, Pa," he cabled, "I will arrange a visa, your tickets and fares. But you must realize that I have a wonderful reputation here as an oil man. When you arrive, you must adapt to American culture or I will be destroyed."

Upon arrival at the train station, the old man, dressed in his long coat and up-brimmed hat, was whisked to a haberdashery, where he was fitted with the latest style fedora and a modern-cut suit. But still, his father looked too Jewish.

"Pa it's not enough. I'll take you to the barber."

The first thing that came off was the beard. The son looked on and said, "it's not enough Pa. The peyos, they'll have to go." The barber cut off the right peya. While the son looked on proudly, his pa was becoming a real American. Then the second. And the old man began to weep.

"Why are you crying, Papa?" the son asked incredulously.

The father, resigned to his fate, simply answered. "I am crying because we lost the Alamo!"

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, in his sefer *Emes L'Yaakov*, explains the concept of sitting in solitude, reflecting in unadulterated honesty about one's true feelings.

There comes a time in one's life where the message from heaven can only be without the influence of others and the will to impress them. How often do we act because of the influence of friends and relatives? How often do we gossip due to peer pressure? We must make choices in life. Honest choices. We have to do what the neshama wants us to do. And we can't alter our true emotion due to social, peer, or monetary pressures.

Henny Youngman, a classic comedian, used to talk about his wonderful doctor. "If you can't afford the operation," he would say, "he'll touch up the x-ray!"

The afflicted man is sent away from anyone who may have influenced him to act in his blathering ways. He can reflect on his true feeling and his honest perceptions of life and his role. But this decision must be made when he is impervious to anyone who was normally in his sphere. And he has a choice. He can pull out the hair, he can scrape off the negah. He can fool the kohen. He can fool his family and fool his friends. But when he returns to the camp, the same man sans negah, the only one fooled is himself. ©2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI ARON TENDLER

Parsha Summary

This week, in addition to the regular Parsha, we read the section known as HaChodesh. The additional

sections of Shekalim, Zachor, Parah, and Chodesh are read prior to Pesach for both commemorative and practical reasons.

This additional section from Shemos, Parshas Bo, Chapter 12, is read on the Shabbos before the month of Nissan, or on the Shabbos of Rosh Chodesh Nissan. This section is an account of the very first Mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a nation. It includes the concept of Rosh Chodesh -- the New Moon, as well as the basic laws of Pesach and the Pascal Lamb. Being that Pesach starts on the 15th of Nissan, this section is read about two weeks before Pesach begins. As with Parshas Parah, Chazal wanted the reading of this Parsha to be a reminder that Pesach is almost upon us! Only two more weeks to make the necessary arrangements to get to Yerushalayim and bring the Paschal Lamb! Only two more weeks and your house had better be in order! (are you panicked yet?)

It is interesting that Hashem selected the Mitzvah of the New Moon as the first national Mitzvah. Basically, the Mitzvah required two eye witnesses to testify before Beis Din that they had seen the tiny sliver of the new moon's crescent that is the very first exposure of the moon's new monthly cycle. The Beis Din would then declare the start of the new month.

The most obvious consequence of this procedure was the 29 or 30 day month, otherwise identified by a one or two day Rosh Chodesh. A two day Rosh Chodesh is comprised of the 30th day of the previous month and the 1st day of the new month. A one day Rosh Chodesh means that the preceding month was only 29 days long making Rosh Chodesh the 1st day of the new month. This would have an immediate effect on the scheduling of Yomim Tovim and other calendar ordained activities. It underscores from the very inception of the nation that the Beis Din, representing the Rabbinic leadership of the nation, were the single most important factor in guaranteeing the practice of Torah throughout time. It was as if G-d would wait for Beis Din to notify Him when His Yomim Tovim were to be. ©2014 Rabbi A. Tandler & torah.org



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