



SHABBAT PARSHAT TAZRIA · 27 ADAR II 5771 · APR. 2, 2011 · VOL. 18 NO. 27

PARSHA INSIGHTS

TAZRIA

“...and it will become a tzara’at affliction on the skin of his flesh...” (13:2)

When G-d created the world, the light of G-dliness radiated from the entire universe like a beacon. Everyone could see clearly the Creator through His creation. As yet, evil had not dulled and masked His radiance in the world. After the sin of the first man, however, G-d hid His presence in the world behind the veil of nature. Thus, nature became more opaque, coarser, until it was well nigh impossible to perceive that it is G-d Who sustains the world.

In Bereishet it says, “*And the L-rd, G-d, made for Adam and his wife garments of skin, and He clothed them.*” (3:21)

The world was covered by a thick membrane — ‘a garment of skin’ — hiding the inside of nature, just as the skin conceals the inside of the human body.

It’s interesting to note that the word for skin in Hebrew, *ohr*, can be pronounced *eeveir*, which means a blind person. Just as the skin, as it were, ‘blinds’ us to the inner reality and workings of the body, so the opacity of nature ‘blinds’ us to the inner reality of G-d’s running the world.

Of course, the skin is no more than a surface covering, and just as skin has pores, microscopic

openings that allow air to enter the body and sweat to be expelled, so too does the “skin” of the world have its ‘pores’ that allow us a view beyond the natural world. If we choose to look we can see the rays of Divine Providence filtering through the cracks of existence.

It’s not by coincidence that the words in Hebrew for both “skin” and “light” are pronounced the same way – *ohr*. For if we open up our eyes, the “skin” of the world that masks G-d’s Hand becomes a light that illuminates His Presence.

However, if those spiritual pores become clogged with the grime of this physical existence, then we lose that sensitivity to the transparency of the world’s “skin” and see nothing but happenstance in a random world.

This is “...the tzara’at affliction on the skin of his flesh...” From Above,

the skin is afflicted when a person disconnects from the inner spiritual world and sees nothing but the outer world of nature.

It is the job of the *kohen* and the *kohanim* of all generations — those who teach Torah to the Jewish People — to turn that membrane of doubt and denial into a light which will light up the universe.

• Source: Based on the *Sfat Emet*

For if we open up our eyes, the “skin” of the world that masks G-d’s Hand becomes a light that illuminates His Presence.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah commands a woman to bring a *korban* after the birth of a child. A son is to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life. The Torah introduces the phenomenon of *tzara'at* (often mistranslated as leprosy) — a miraculous affliction that attacks people, clothing and buildings to awaken a person to spiritual failures. A *kohen* must be consulted to determine whether a particular mark is *tzara'at* or not. The *kohen* isolates the sufferer for a week.

If the malady remains unchanged, confinement continues for a second week, after which the *kohen* decides the person's status. The Torah describes the different forms of *tzara'at*. One whose *tzara'at* is confirmed wears torn clothing, does not cut his hair, and must alert others that he is ritually impure. He may not have normal contact with people. The phenomenon of *tzara'at* on clothing is described in detail.

ISRAEL Forever

THE RIGHT TO KNOW?

The “right of the public to know” is the excuse used by the media everywhere for publicizing all of the wrongdoings of society. The trouble with this attitude is that it legitimizes slander.

This week's Torah portion, which deals extensively with the laws of *tzara'at*, a leprosy-like physical malady with a spiritual source, provides us with a powerful warning against indulging in slander. The slanderer, say our Sages, becomes a victim of this malady as indicated by the name *metzora* he is given. *Metzora* is a contraction of the words *motzi* and *rah*,

which means disseminating evil reports.

While there is a positive side to informing the public, it is not an excuse for demonizing political opponents or creating the impression of guilt before trial. Slander has tragically become the bread and butter of the media in Israel as well as the rest of the world.

Even though Heaven does not send its messages of *tzara'at* these days, the message communicated in this week's Torah portion reminds us to guard our tongue in order to secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

SHIMON HATZADDIK – THE MYSTERIOUS VISION

Shimon Hatzaddik was one of the last surviving members of the *Anshei Knesset Hagedola* (Members of the Great Assembly), who became the *Kohen Gadol* after Ezra who led the return of Jews from Babylonian exile to Eretz Yisrael.

When he was informed that Alexander the Great was leading an army to destroy the *Beit Hamikdash*, which the Jew-hating Kuttites (Samaritans) had convinced him was a threat to his Macedonian Empire, he took immediate emergency action. Donning the sacred



garments reserved for performance of the Holy Temple services, he walked all night, together with Jerusalem notables, to meet this force. When the two groups finally met at dawn, the mighty king descended from his royal chariot and prostrated himself before Shimon Hatzaddik, explaining that it was this vision which he always saw leading him to victory in battle. The tables were thus turned on the Kuttites as the destruction which they planned for the *Beit Hamikdash* was visited instead on their idolatrous shrine on Mount Gerizim.

לע"נ
הרב פסח יוסף בן ר' שלמה יהודה זצ"ל
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When does a woman who has given birth to a son go to the *mikveh*?
2. After a woman gives birth, she is required to offer two types of offerings. Which are they?
3. What animal does the woman offer as a *chatat*?
4. Which of these offerings makes her *tahor* (ritual purity)?
5. Which of the sacrifices does the woman offer first, the *olah* or the *chatat*?
6. Who determines whether a person is a *metzora tamei* (person with ritually impure *tzara'at*) or is *tahor*?
7. If the *kohen* sees that the *tzara'at* has spread after one week, how does he rule?
8. What disqualifies a *kohen* from being able to give a ruling in a case of *tzara'at*?
9. Why is the appearance of *tzara'at* on the tip of one of the 24 "limbs" that project from the body usually unable to be examined?
10. On which days is a *kohen* not permitted to give a ruling on *tzara'at*?
11. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow (e.g., the head or beard), what color hair is indicative of ritual impurity?
12. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow, what color hair is indicative of purity?
13. If the *kohen* intentionally or unintentionally pronounces a *tamei* person "*tahor*," what is that person's status?
14. What signs of mourning must a *metzora* display?
15. Why must a *metzora* call out, "*Tamei! Tamei!*"?
16. Where must a *metzora* dwell?
17. Why is a *metzora* commanded to dwell in isolation?
18. What sign denotes *tzara'at* in a garment?
19. What must be done to a garment that has *tzara'at*?
20. If after washing a garment the signs of *tzara'at* disappear entirely, how is the garment purified?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 12:2 - At the end of seven days.
2. 12:6 - An *olah* and a *chatat*.
3. 12:6 - A *tor* (turtle dove) or a *ben yona* (young pigeon).
4. 12:7 - The *chatat*.
5. 12:8 - The *chatat*.
6. 13:2 - A *kohen*.
7. 13:5 - The person is *tamei*.
8. 13:12 - Poor vision.
9. 13:14 - The *tzara'at* as a whole must be seen at one time. Since these parts are angular, they cannot be seen at one time.
10. 13:14 - During the festivals; and ruling on a groom during the seven days of feasting after the marriage.
11. 13:29 - Golden.
12. 13:37 - Any color other than golden.
13. 13:37 - He remains *tamei*.
14. 13:45 - He must tear his garments, let his hair grow wild, and cover his lips with his garment.
15. 13:45 - So people will know to keep away from him.
16. 13:46 - Outside the camp in isolation.
17. 13:46 - Since *tzara'at* is a punishment for *lashon hara* (evil speech), which creates a rift between people, the Torah punishes measure for measure by placing a division between him and others.
18. 13:49 - A dark green or dark red discoloration.
19. 13:52 - It must be burned
20. 13:58 - Through immersion in a *mikveh*.

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- Two mincha offerings that got mixed up before *kemitzah*
- When kosher and non-kosher meats get mixed up
- If the *kometz* becomes ritually impure or is taken out of the Sanctuary
- The impact of the *tzitz* headplate of the *Kohen Gadol* on disqualified offerings
- If the remainders of the mincha are no longer available for consumption after *kemitzah*
- The need to sanctify the *kometz* with a sacred vessel
- Which elements of sacrifices are inseparable
- The interdependence of the four species on Succot
- Menorah, mezuzah and tzitzit
- The material from which the menorah must be made
- Some rules regarding the letters of the mezuzah

THE FIERY COIN

In regard to three things Moshe found difficulty in visualizing and needed Heavenly assistance. He had to be shown how the menorah for the Mishkan Sanctuary should look, how much of the new moon must be visible in order to determine when to declare Rosh Chodesh, and which of the creeping creatures are the forbidden ones.

This statement by the Sages of Rabbi Yishmael's Yeshiva seems to overlook one other instance when Moshe had to actually be shown something. When G-d commanded that Jews had to contribute a *machatzit hashekel* coin for the construction of the Mishkan Sanctuary, Moshe found difficulty in visualizing and had to be shown a coin of fire, the

size of which should be contributed in silver.

One of the resolutions offered by the commentaries is that Moshe's difficulty was not in regard to the nature of the coin itself but rather in regard to its purpose. Since the construction of the Mishkan was in atonement for the sin of the Red Heifer, it was inconceivable to Moshe that so small a contribution as half-shekel should achieve atonement for each individual.

The answer he received from Heaven was a coin of fire whose message was that what would achieve atonement was not merely the value of the coin but the fiery spirit of repentance and devotion with which it was given.

• *Menachot 29a*

What the SAGES Say

"Just as the four species on Succot must all be taken together, so too do Jews find favor only when they are united together."

• *Beraita - Menachot 27a*

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POSITIVE THINKING

From: Andrea

*Dear Rabbi,
Would you say that Judaism is an “optimistic” religion? Is there room for positive thinking within Judaism?*

Dear Andrea,

I would say yes, Judaism is definitely an optimistic religion and positive thinking plays an important role in a Jew’s world view in general, and service of G-d in particular.

All the stories in the Torah are positive. Individuals or the Jewish nation may have experienced difficulties or suffered setbacks, but ultimately, they succeeded and good was achieved and prevailed. This is true regarding Adam’s repentance and the continuation of humanity, the preservation of Noah and his descendants through the flood, Abraham’s spreading the message of G-d to all mankind, the Tribes’ redemption from Egypt and the Jewish People’s receiving the Promised Land.

The fact that all of these wonderful things happened not in the context of serenity, stability and prosperity but rather on the backdrop of great personal and national obstacles and hardships illustrates that Judaism’s optimism is not only of a “natural” sort, but even when against all odds. There is no “Tragedy” in Jewish literature, nor is there “Fatalism” in Jewish philosophy. Even the suffering Job, tutored and elevated by his hardships, rose to true greatness in the end.

The promising messages of the Prophets and the novel idea of the Messianic Era in Judaism also demonstrate its essential optimism. A religion which maintains such a glorious view of the future despite the often dire reality of the present, particularly regarding the Jewish People itself, certainly encourages positive thinking.

Prayer is another example of Jewish optimism. We need not accept imperfections of the present. In fact, the word for prayer in Hebrew, “*tefilla*”, connotes wrestling. In prayer, one wrestles with oneself, one’s reality and even with G-d in order to change things for the better.

That being said, Jewish positive thinking also enables one to accept an imperfect present if need be. Or rather,

Jewish optimism extends beyond hoping for a brighter future to include illuminating what seems to be a dismal present. If after making responsible effort to improve our reality, things don’t get “better”, Judaism teaches not just that one must accept (at least temporarily) his lot, but also that this reality, insofar as it’s the Will of G-d (at least temporarily), is actually the best possible reality.

This extending the idea of “making the best of a bad situation” to “seeing what seems to be bad as the best situation” is exemplified by a famous story regarding Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva was on the way and needed lodgings for the night. When he entered town asking for hospitality, he was summarily denied it. Exclaiming, “Whatever G-d does is for the best”, he set up camp in the nearby forest, lighting a candle, and making provisions for his rooster and donkey, intending to get an early start in the morning. During the night, a wind came and blew out the candle leaving him in complete darkness. He exclaimed, “All is for the best”. A cat came and ate the rooster preventing his early rise – “All is for the best”. A lion came and devoured the donkey taking his source of transportation – “All is for the best”. In the morning he saw that the town had been invaded and looted by robbers and all the inhabitants had been killed. When Rabbi Akiva considered that had he been admitted to the town, or after having camped in the woods, had the candle been lit, he would have been seen and had the cat meowed or the donkey brayed, he would have been heard, he once again justifiably exclaimed, “All that G-d does, He does for the best!”

An interesting idea to ponder is whether our thoughts actually have an effect on reality, such that pessimism breeds a negative actuality while optimism actually creates a positive reality. The mystical and Chasidic teachings of Judaism are replete with the idea that not only what we do and say has an effect for good or for bad on the physical and spiritual worlds, but even something as subtle and intangible as thoughts have such an effect.

And in truth, since G-d thought Existence into being (the statement, “And G-d said...” being understood as an expression of G-d’s Will, since G-d doesn’t speak), and since mankind was created in the image of G-d (again, not to be understood literally but rather in our ability to will), then just as G-d thinks Creation, our thoughts can also create reality and it’s positively worth thinking positive!

SAVING A PLACE IN LINE

Question: A friend of mine is traveling on the same flight as me but will be arriving at the airport a little later. In order to avoid waiting for a long time in the rather lengthy check-in line he has asked me to hold a place for him in my line so that he can save time. Is it proper for me to cooperate with such a maneuver and for him to benefit from it?

Answer: The question of doing someone a favor at the expense of others has already been dealt with in the Talmud in issues ranging from collecting a debt to taking possession of an abandoned object. The general rule laid down by our Sages is that you cannot be a nice guy when it is *chav le'acheirim*, at the expense of others. Why should passengers who took the trouble, like yourself, to come early to the airport wait longer in line to accommodate your late arriving friend?

This issue is not limited to airline check-in lines. It extends to all sorts of situation, from queues in supermarket checkout lanes to lines in government offices. Another

example is that of boarding a very crowded bus or train and saving a seat next to you for a friend arriving a little later and thus forcing an earlier arrival to remain standing throughout the ride.

One possible exception to this rule is a common situation where you are standing in line already and wish to leave for a few minutes to take care of some urgent personal matter and ask the party next to you to reserve your place in line. This seems to be fair because there is a general consensus among people waiting in line, to allow for such an arrangement since it does not really affect them in any way. If there are people behind you in that line it is a good idea to announce to them that you are only going out for a while so that they will not suspect you of being a late arrival whose place in line has been saved.

In conclusion, such situations should be handled by following the counsel of the Sage Hillel: "Don't do to others what you would not want done to you."

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

A LIFESAVING CAUTION

An urgent telephone call interrupted a meeting which Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, was having with some of the residents of the neighborhood about how to increase public participation in the local Torah classes. The catalyst for this meeting was a tragic spate of untimely deaths in the community, and the tone of this call indicated that another might be on the way.

"An hour ago I prescribed a medicine for a woman in your community," said the doctor on the other end in an alarmed voice, "and I just realized that I made a grave mistake. If she

takes that medicine it could do her irreparable harm. You must stop her immediately!"

After figuring out exactly where this woman lived, one of the men at the meeting rushed out to sound the alarm. No sooner had he reached the next street than he saw the woman's husband pacing back and forth. "My wife bought a medicine the doctor prescribed for her," he explained, "but she refuses to take it until she is assured that it is kosher. I gave it to a local pharmacological expert to analyze and am out here waiting for his verdict."

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Earthquake in Japan

THEN & NOW

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

When news of an earthquake in Japan a century ago reached the Radin Yeshiva, the sainted Chafetz Chaim assembled the students and delivered an inspiring mussar lecture.

This was a lesson we all must learn upon hearing of another earthquake in that same country but far more devastating. While we sympathize with the people of Japan in their hour of suffering, it is incumbent upon us to learn from their disaster.

The truth is that this lesson was delivered millennia ago by the Prophet Tzephaniah who declared in the Name of G-d:

“I have cut off nations; their pinnacles are desolate; I have made their streets waste so that none passes by; their cities are destroyed so that there is no man, there is no inhabitant. I said, Surely you will fear me and will learn a lesson.” (3:6-7)

The words of the Prophet are quoted in a lecture written during the Middle Ages by the great Talmudic commentator

Rabbeinu Nissim who points out that when people fail to learn from the disasters which strike others, they cause such tragedy to come closer to them. One who fails to see natural disasters as a Heavenly warning and fails to make any improvements, he concludes, is comparable to one who has sinned after being warned and thus exposes himself to retribution.

How appropriate to the current disaster is the clarion call of this same author:

“Sometimes things happen in faraway places, in distant islands, so that people should be aroused to self-improvement because of the fear that such tragedy could strike them as well.”

May we merit to learn the lesson delivered by G-d, explained by the Prophet and echoed by our Sages throughout the generations, so that we will be spared from seeing such events come closer to home.

“cleaning up the country”

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

It is not often that a government minister in Israel begins a letter with a quote from the Midrash. This is what caught my attention when I saw the “invitation to join the effort to clean up Israel” issued by the Environment Protection Ministry Gilad Erdan.

Citing the Midrash (*Kohelet* 7:28) about G-d declaring that everything was created for man and he must avoid corrupting the world, the Minister announced a new project called “National Cleanup Day.” On March 29th a nationwide effort was made by soldiers, youth organizations, pupils and municipal employees to clean up the rubbish in open areas and engage in the promotion of care for the environment.

The initiative of Minister Erdan is certainly to be applauded. If a Talmudic Sage is reported to have removed rocks from a public thoroughfare so that no one could have complaints about the Holy Land, the concern for environmental beauty should certainly be viewed as a facet of our love of the land.

But why is cleanliness limited to the elimination of

exposed garbage?

What about the filth which permeates the media and the entertainment world? Scattered garbage may offend the eyes – and sometimes the noses – of passersby, but the garbage that is so widespread in radio, television, internet and cinema offend the eyes and ears and pollute the mind and soul.

How wonderful it would be to receive a letter from another government minister, the one in charge of communication, announcing a “National Cleanup Day” of these media menaces.

How fitting it is to reflect on this in this pre-Pesach period of cleaning up our homes. Despite the “spring cleaning” element which Jewish housewives add to their Pesach cleaning, the basic purpose of such cleaning is to eliminate the *chametz* which endangers the soul. This should send a message to the organizers and participants of Erdan’s National Cleanup Day to eliminate the *chametz* which threatens the soul of the nation throughout the year.