



TORAH ACADEMY
of Bergen County

קול תורה

Parashat Tazri'a-Metzora

4 Iyar 5781

April 16, 2021

Vol. 30 No. 32

THE PANDEMIC OF THE MIDBAR

By Eitan Laub ('22)

At first glance, Tzara'at seems like a normal disease that's spreading. Of course stopping the spread in the Midbar is extremely important, so anyone showing any symptoms would need to quarantine and those who test positive would have to isolate. That's the whole goal, right? To stop the contagious disease from spreading by quarantining the Metzora? Well kind of, but not really.

The Mishnah in Nega'im 3:2 says, "*Chatan SheNir'eh Bo Nega, Notnin Lo Shio'at Yemei HaMishteh, Lo ULeBeito VeLeChsuto*," "A bridegroom on whom a nega has appeared is given the seven days of the marriage feast [in which he is not examined]", "*VeChein BaRegel, Notnim Lo Kol Yemot HaRegel*," "Similarly during a festival, one is granted exemption from inspection during all the days of the festival". If there were some sort of global pandemic going around, would we say that newlyweds who are showing symptoms do not need to get tested because they are in the middle of Sheva Brachot? If someone is not feeling well over Yom Tov, should they not get tested after Chag? Of course not! If the affliction of Tzara'at was exclusively a bodily disease, we must take all precautions to ensure others do not get infected! It would seem that Tzara'at is more than just a bodily disease, rather it is a physical representation of a spiritual disease. Reish Lakish questions what "*Zot Tihyeh Torat HaMetzora*," "this will be the law of the Metzora" (VaYikra 14:2) means. He answers "*Zot Tihyeh Torato Shel Motzi Shem Ra*" "this will be the law for one who slanders (Motzi Shem Ra)". The Gemara later in the Masechta teaches that Tzara'at was also a punishment for those who committed sins (Bein Adam LaChaveiro) such as killing, sexual immorality, pride, robbery and selfishness.

Although some of these sins are punishable by court and others aren't, Hashem still feels the need to step in and do something. These sins show the Metzora's lack of empathy for the congregation, which Hashem takes great offense to. The anti-social behaviors of such an individual force them to be quarantined outside the camp for seven days and force them to practice social distancing with their families upon their return, because they cannot function in a normal society filled with normal socializing. In their quarantine and isolation, they are given the time and opportunity to repent for their sins and learn how to be a good social person. And when the Kohein returns later that week to see that the person did not do Teshuvah

and the affliction worsened, the Metzora will be forced back into his quarantine to start over.

While today we are asymptomatic for Tzara'at, we still commit sins that would have given us Tzara'at. We should always be developing our "vaccine" to prevent us from doing such horrible things.

As we get deeper into Sefirat Ha'Omer, now is the perfect time to improve our relationships. One of the reasons given for our mourning during Sefirah is that Rabi Akiva's 24,000 students died "*SheLo Nahagu Kavod Zeh LaZeh*" "because they did not treat each other with proper respect."

Perhaps if we take the lessons from the "Torat HaMetzora" to heart, Hashem will rebuild the Beit HaMikdash (which was destroyed over baseless hatred) in time for us all to worship Him there on Shavu'ot.

A TALE OF TWO PARSHIYOT

By Nachi Scheiner ('22)

Before writing the two Divrei Torah below, I would like to give a brief introduction to the sefer that I found them in: *VaYeVareich Shlomo*. With great Simcha, my uncle, Rabbi George Silfen, published his first sefer titled *VaYeVareich Shlomo* on Torah UMo'adim. Named after my grandfather who, at a very young age, escaped the growing Nazi party and moved to Bolivia. He had no Jewish education (in fact he went to Catholic school but skipped bible classes), but did everything he could to give my mother and uncle a Jewish education. The spiritual success of his grandchildren is his greatest pride, and the greatest gift he could have received was a sefer written in his name, Shlomo. Rabbi Silfen's extreme dedication and passion manifested themselves in the intricacy and wisdom in every Dvar Torah.

PARASHAT TAZRIA – WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In this week's Parashah, Tazria, we learn about Tzara'at that strikes a house: "*Ki Tavo'u El Eretz Cena'an Asher Ani Notein Lachem La'Achuza VeNatati Nega Tzara'at BeVeit Eretz Achuzatchem*," "When you enter the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I inflict an eruptive plague upon a house in the land you possess" (Vayikra 14:34). The Ramban derives from the phrase "*Ki Tavo'u El Eretz Cena'an*", that Tzara'at only strikes a house in Eretz Yisrael (contrary to what one may assume that the focus is on an "*Achuza*" meaning land that someone owns). Rabbi Menachem Genack explains that unlike the majority of Mitzvot that are connected to the Kedushah of the land of Israel, Tzara'at fringes upon the **name** Eretz Yisrael. Even between the first and second temple when there was no Kedushah (at least according to the Rambam who adopts the approach that the Kedushah that was installed into Eretz Yisrael in the days of Shlomo and the first temple was only temporary), there

Kol Torah is a community wide publication that relies on generous donations from our friends and family in the community for its continuous existence. To sponsor an issue in memory of a loved one, in honor of a joyous occasion, or for a Refu'ah Sheleimah, please contact:
business@koltorah.org

was still a possibility of getting Tzara'at on one's home. Why is Tzara'at special?

It could be that since Tzara'at is a punishment for misusing one's tongue, the punishment fringes upon the Kedusha of the name Eretz Yisrael. (Therefore, now in days when Eretz Yisrael is called by so many different names and doesn't have that same status of a holy name, we don't have Tzara'at.) This serves as a stark reminder to the owner of the house of the importance and value of even the name of a place and how much more so the name and reputation of one's fellow human being.

[Another Halachah that is also connected to the name "Eretz Yisrael" is sanctifying the new month. So too with sanctifying the month, Beit Din is required to declare with their mouths that the new month is sanctified and it is Rosh Chodesh. Since sanctifying the new month fringes upon Beit Din's mouths it also is connected to the holy name of Eretz Yisrael.]

PARASHAT METZORA – Killing Two Birds With Two STONES?!

In this week's [second] Parashah, we learn the laws of the Metzora's purification. After Recovering from his leprosy, a Metzora can finally begin his/her purification rituals. A significant part of these rituals is bringing two birds. One bird is slaughtered in the city where the Metzora lives and the other is brought to a field and set free. Why do we allow one bird to live and the other to die? And why do we take one to his/her city and the other to the fields?

Rav Moshe Sternbuch answers the second question based on the two types of slander: 1. Public slander 2. Private, secretive slander. To atone for the public defamation, we bring one of the birds into the middle of the city, the most populated place, and we slaughter it on the spot. However, we also bring another bird to the field, a private place, to gain atonement for the secretive slander. Rav Sternbuch adds that the commandment to dip the bird of the field into the slaughtered bird's blood symbolizes that even the most discreet slander makes its way to the masses (The Torah understood the phrase "news spreads like wildfire" even before the term was coined).

With regards to question number one, the Ba'al HaTurim writes that the slaughtered bird alludes to the complete destruction of the Tzara'at. Conversely, the bird we send away reminds the Metzora that if he continues in his slanderous ways the Tza'arat will once again inflict him.

Connecting the answers to questions one and two, Rabbi Silfen reveals the essence of the two birds. The bird of the field is meant to show that even though the Metzora is now healed and most likely will not publicly slander others, he/she still might have the desire to privately slander. One can say "no one will know or it won't damage his/her reputation", but the Torah responds that if you continue to slander others, even in private, the Tzara'at will once again inflict you.

Blessings in Disguise

By Zevi Segal ('22)

In this week's Parshi'ot, Parashat Tazri'a and Parashat Metzora, the topic of Tzara'at is addressed. In Parashat Metzora it says, "*Ki Tavo'u El Eretz Kena'an Asher Natan Lachem La'Achuzah VeNatati Nega Tzara'at BeVeit Eretz Achuzatchem,*" "When you come to Israel that I am giving you as a possession and I will give Tzara'at on the houses of the land" (VaYikra 14:34). The entire concept of Tzara'at is very hard to understand. Hashem could punish the Jewish people in so many different ways, but he chooses to blemish one's house or skin. Rashi addresses this and says that Tzara'at itself is not a punishment at all, it is actually a way in which Hashem rewards people (Rashi talks about a case where a man would find a blemish or discoloration on the wall of his house, have to knock it out, and discover treasure behind it). A Midrash in VaYikra Rabbah 17:6 agrees with Rashi's view on Tzara'at and gives an explanation as to how the treasure behind the walls got there in the first place. The Midrash says that the whole time the Canaanites were present in the desert, they tended to hide their treasures in the walls of their homes. As a result of the Tzara'at, someone would destroy the wall of their house and discover the Canaanite's riches behind it. Nonetheless, there is still a problem: There is still an abundance of other ways God could have notified the Jews that he was rewarding them. Why this one? The Ramban notes that the specific wording and language of the Pasuk indicates that Hashem is emphasizing that He is the one who is going to do this and that it is a direct reward or punishment from Him. Rav Avraham J. Twersky notes that this sign could've been presented in so many different ways, but Hashem specifically chose to do it this way because He wanted to show that some things can be blessings in disguise.

There is a famous story of a soldier who was in great debt to a Rabbi. He asked the Rabbi what he could do to repay him, but the Rabbi always said there was no need. After begging the Rabbi for a long time, the soldier got his wish. The Rabbi said to pick one law in Shulchan Aruch and to follow it. The soldier opened the Shulchan Aruch and read that he should put on his right shoe before his left shoe and then tie his left shoe before his right shoe. The soldier committed to doing this at all costs. A few years later, in a time of war, the soldier rushed to get onto a helicopter, but realized he had put on his left shoe before his right shoe. He stopped to take off his shoes and do everything in the correct order, causing him to miss the helicopter. He was devastated. He watched the helicopter fly off without him for about half a minute before it crashed and exploded. Rav Yehuda Amital ZT"L, the old Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion and a concentration camp survivor who lost his parents and all his siblings in Auschwitz, said that when one observes events through the lens of faith, the fog is dispersed and things ultimately become clearer. One finally arrives at a sense of inner certainty and peace of mind. This obviously cannot be scientifically proven but nonetheless is extremely powerful and moving.

THE METZORA'S TRUE PAIN AND ITS REMEDY

By Dr. Michael Atlas

"But as for me, G-d's nearness is my good", proclaims King David (Tehillim 73). Distance from G-d therefore, is for King David, something highly unappealing. Not physical discomfort or social

isolation but a fracture in the relationship between him and G-d is something that appears would most concern King David.

As a result of sin, the Metzora is afflicted with a skin disease which according to the Abarbanel was highly painful. In addition, the Metzora was placed MiChutz LaMachaneh, outside the camp, distanced from others. The Metzora is afflicted with this skin disorder, according to Rav Shmuel Bar Nachmani (Arachin 15b) for, among other sins, arrogance. The Gemara in Arachin relates earlier that the verse *"I and he cannot dwell in the world"* (Tehillim 101) refers to one who is arrogant. An exaggerated sense of self importance and the need to dominate others is what distances man from G-d, and results in a Nega which is physically uncomfortable and detachment from social interaction.

While Tzara'at no doubt is a punishment, many commentaries explain that the punishment of course is truly a gift as the true pain is not the physical discomfort or the social isolation but the disconnect from Hashem which the sin of arrogance causes. The punishment allows the Metzora to reflect, do Teshuvah and return to his community and his Creator.

After the skin returns to normal the Kohein meets the Metzora outside the camp and *"The priest shall order two live clean birds, cedar wood, crimson stuff, and hyssop to be brought for him who is to be cleansed"*. He is to take specifically a hyssop and use that plant in the conclusion of the ritual *"He shall then sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the eruption and cleanse him; and he shall set the live bird free in the open field"*.

The intervention for a skewed perception and inflated sense of self importance is to become "grounded." The hyssop, which is used to sprinkle the blood and Mayim Chayim onto the Metzora, is a plant which Rashi comments, grows low to the ground. It is this plant which is symbolic of the Metzora's need to return to reality and see himself and others in a more reasonable light. He is to return to his community only after he sees himself in collaboration not in competition with his fellow man. At the end of this ritual, the live bird is released LaSadeh. The Ishbitzer Rebbe cites the Mishnah in Nega'im (14:2) says that the bird is to be released specifically to a field. He then explains that "after having been given G-d's salvation, the Metzora represented by the live bird, no longer needs to constrict himself, but rather can live more expansively". He can do that though only after he gains proper perspective of himself within his environment.

The Ishbitzer concludes his comments quoting the Zohar that Sadeh is an allusion to the Sadeh which Yitzchak mentions in his Brachah to Yaakov *"Keraich HaSadeh Asher Bercho Adnai."* Rashi comments that this smell refers to a field of apples which in kabbalistic terminology, is reference to Gan Eden,

The bird being released into the field (Gan Eden, the place where one dwells with the Shechina) is to give the Metzora a sense of himself in relation to his fellow man and his Creator in the hope that he will retain this perspective, which will allow him to remain among his fellow man, dwell with Shechinah and experience the true Good.

ELISHA AND THE NORTHERN KINGDOM, THE ARBA'AH METZORA'IM; HAFTARAH BEFORE YOM HA'ATZMA'UT

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

No Coincidence!

There are no coincidences in Jewish life. The fact that the story of the Metzora'im (lepers) who bring about the miraculous rescue of the city of Shomeron from an Aramean siege (Melachim II 7:3-20) is read as the Haftarah on the Shabbat before Yom Ha'Atzma'ut in a non-leap year is most certainly not a coincidence. There are at least three significant parallels that draw us to the conclusion that it is providential that this story is read in most years in close proximity to Yom Ha'Atzma'ut.

Miracle via the Spiritually Deficient

Rav Aharon Soloveichik already comments on the connection between Yom HaAtzma'ut and the Haftarah in a lecture given at Yeshiva University in 1966, on the 18th anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel:²³⁶ *Printed in Gesher, Vol. 4 (Yeshiva University, 1966).*

Those who do not recognize the importance of the establishment of the State of Israel give several reasons. The first argument raised is that non-observant Jews led the movements which culminated in the establishment of the State. They argue that the results of such leadership cannot be of great historical significance for the Jewish people. These results cannot be considered a step towards redemption, but rather as a step away from redemption.

Chapter seven of Melachim II has a bearing on all these arguments. Samaria (Shomeron), the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, was besieged by the mighty armies of Syria and was in the throes of famine. Ordinary food was unobtainable and articles of food which, under normal circumstances, would have been considered repulsive were obtainable only at fantastic prices. Samaria seemed doomed.

Desperate as the situation of the inhabitants of Samaria was, the condition of the four lepers outside the city (Melachim II 7:3) was infinitely worse. According to our Sages, these four lepers were none other than Gechazi and his three sons who were afflicted with physical leprosy as a penalty for their spiritual leprosy [described by Rambam as heretics].

Subsequently, they entered the city of Samaria and conveyed the good tidings to the inhabitants. We thus see that the miracle of deliverance of the inhabitants of Samaria was carried out through the medium of four lepers: physical lepers, yes, but above all, spiritual lepers.

The first argument as to how any relief to the Jewish people could be realized through the medium of heretics can easily be rebutted by the precedent of the deliverance accorded to the people of Samaria through the medium of the four lepers. This episode shows that no Jew can be excluded from the grace of God, that, and that there is an innate tendency towards altruism even in the hearts of spiritual lepers; it also shows that God does not exclude any Jew from salvation and He may therefore designate even spiritual lepers as the messengers of relief and deliverance for the people of Israel. Consequently, we cannot ignore the significance of the establishment of the State of Israel simply because Jews who stand a substantial distance from any form of observance of Mitzvot were in the forefront of the movements which established the State and are in the forefront of the State itself. Perhaps the fact that non-observant

Jews are in the forefront today is a penalty for Orthodox Jewry's failure to play the most important part in the formation of the State.

We may add to Rav Aharon Soloveichik's insight that the four lepers are not the only spiritually deficient beneficiaries and triggers of the miracles. The Israelite leadership is awash with either outright deniers or doubters of Elisha. Even the Israelite king also harbors sharply ambivalent feelings towards Elisha, as is evident from Melachim II 6:31 and 7:12.

Stronger Enemies Flee Due to Loud Noise

After the Metzora'im decide to surrender to the Arameans, Hashem causes the Aramean camp to hear "*Kol Rechev, Kol Sus, Kol Chayil*," "the sound of the chariot, the sound of the horse, [and] the sound of a great army" (Melachim II 7:6). The Aramean army misinterprets this noise as an attack by the Egyptian and Hittite armed forces and therefore flees in panic from the hapless Bnei Yisrael of the city of Shomeron. The parallel to Israel's War of Independence is striking. During this war, as is well known and documented, Israel had (especially at the onset of hostilities) a severe shortage of armaments, especially heavy artillery. However, it did develop the Davidka, a home-made artillery piece that was largely ineffective but made a great amount of noise:

The battles raged for months, until the spring of 1948, several days before Israel was declared a State. In late April, an artillery piece, nicknamed "The Davidka" was delivered to the Jews. They shot it off several times, but the mortars did little damage.....the main effect was the tremendous noise. However, the weather changed, and, unusually for that time of year, it began to rain. The rumor quickly spread through the Arab community that the Jews had acquired the atom bomb, and the entire Arab community left that night. With their exit, morale deteriorated among the Arab troops, and the Haganah was able to secure the city.²³⁷"War of Independence in Tzfat." The City of Tzfat, www.safed.co.il/war-of-independence-in-tzfat.html.

Thus, the connection to the Haftarah is obvious. A very loud noise is grossly misinterpreted by our much stronger enemy, and the enemy flees due to its irrational fear of the noise, leading to our liberation from a mortal threat. There are numerous other stories told of Arab forces fleeing during Israel's War of Independence due to their leader's extreme exaggeration of the Jewish forces' capabilities.

A Siege of the Capital City

Another striking similarity is that in both situations, the capital cities of the area have a fierce siege set upon them with very serious threats of starvation. The Arabs succeeded in setting siege upon Jerusalem in 1948, and as a result, the serious threat of starvation loomed heavily upon the city. It was only the successful completion of the "Burma Road" to Jerusalem that broke the siege.

Marred Miracles

Another much more uncomfortable and sobering parallel lurks between the Aramean siege and Yom HaAtzma'ut. In Melachim II 7, Elisha intercedes and facilitates a miracle on behalf of the beleaguered Bnei Yisrael of Shomeron. However, it is far from a "neat" or "clean" miracle. Much intense suffering ensues before and after the miraculous rescue of Shomeron.

The people of Shomeron experience bitterly intense starvation to the extent that mothers eat the flesh of their children (Melachim II 6:28-29)! Even after the great redemption from the Aramean forces, crowds who hurriedly race to the food and wealth

left by the Aramean army trample a leading official to death. The otherwise joyful celebration is marred by this ugly incident.

The parallel is a most difficult but important one to contemplate. Our victory in Israel's War of Independence was undoubtedly miraculous. However, the suffering endured in victory was immense. One percent of Israel's population fell. The damage to property was incalculable. Although the victory in the War of Independence was a cause for great joy, considering the very heavy losses that were sustained, there was hardly jubilation in the air at war's end.

Shomeron's miracle rescue is marred by the region's spiritual deficiencies. While years of outreach by Eliyahu HaNavi and Elisha make some improvements, most of the northern Bnei Yisrael are still severely deficient. The same may be said, we believe, about Israel in the wake of its astounding victory in its first war.

Improvement Needed

The suffering endured by the people of Shomeron is intended as a reminder that although Hashem intervenes to save the people of Shomeron, much spiritual improvement is still needed within the Northern Kingdom. Although it is difficult for us to note this, in linking this Haftarah to Yom HaAtzma'ut, Hashem communicates a similar message.

Unfortunately, the northern Bnei Yisrael fail to internalize this message— the Northern Kingdom is destroyed approximately one hundred and fifty years after the miracle at Shomeron. This is a heavy message to consider, but we dare not repeat the behavior of the northern Bnei Yisrael, who ignore the spiritual message inherent in their marred miracle.

Conclusion

It is important to note the Tanach parallels that reassure us that Hashem has brought a great miracle for us by the creation of the State of Israel. However, it is the prudent course of action to also consider the Mussar (rebuke) and warning the contemporary parallels to Tanach communicate to us, even in times of celebration.

May we internalize the message of this Haftarah, and thereby merit seeing the development of Medinat Yisrael into a society worthy of receiving the Melech HaMashi'ach with open arms.

Editors-in-Chief Emeritus: Noam Barenholtz, Harry Meister, and Eitan Mermelstein

Editors-in-Chief: Ezra Lebowitz and Aidan Samet

Publishing Managers: Ezra Luber, Daniel Kroopnick, and Asher Rauzman

Publication Editor: Kivi Davis and Chanan Schreiber

Communications: Dequarious Simmons

Business Manager: Ezra Ratner

Rabbinic Advisor: Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Questions, comments? Contact us at:

Kol Torah

c/o Torah Academy of Bergen County

1600 Queen Anne Road

Teaneck, NJ 07666

Phone: (201) 837-7696

koltorah@koltorah.org