

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
TAZRIA-METZORA

The human body is subject to all sorts of pressures that affect its health and well-being. Modern medicine has shown how mental moods, stress and psychic disturbances can adversely affect physical health and appearance. As modern technology has exploded in our time, in spite of all of its advantages, and there are many, our lives have become more stressful...and unfortunately psychological disorders abound.

This is especially true here in Israel where the stress level is always high and the pressure of being part of the actual rebuilding process of the Jewish people is felt daily and in myriad ways. To this empiric lesson of societal life, the Torah adds another dimension of activity, which can and did have physical effects at the beginning of our history as a nation.

The plagues that are described in this week's Torah reading and their physical manifestations defy any easy and rational explanation. The rabbis of the Talmud ascribed these ills as being caused by slanderous speech and evil social behavior. Just as driving in traffic – especially Jerusalem traffic these days – will raise one's blood pressure significantly, so to, speaking ill of other people also has a physical manifestation and not only a spiritual sin attached to it.

The Torah spends a great deal of space and detail to outline this physical manifestation and the necessity for purification of the body and the mind, in order to arrest and cure the disease. I do not know how this physical and spiritual connection does occur, but I do not know why mental stress and traffic jams should raise one's blood pressure either. Apparently, our Creator has wired us so that this is the case. And, so it is with the disease and plagues described in this week's Torah reading.

The priest who was involved in the diagnosis and healing process for this plague is not seen or described as a medical expert. He is rather what we would call today a mental therapist, a spiritual and psychological guide who becomes God's agent to lift the diseased person out of his misery. There is a period of isolation and quarantine that becomes part of the process of healing. This is to allow for the introspection and self-analysis that is a necessary component of all psychological and mental healing.

A disease that is caused by spiritual failure as much as by physical malfunction must be cured by repairing the spiritual breach that originally caused it. And that can be accomplished only by a realistic and honest appraisal of one's self... of one's spiritual strengths and weaknesses. Because of this truth, it is the spiritual priest, the defendant of Aaron, who becomes the key catalyst in the process of recovery and rehabilitation.

The Torah is the true practitioner of holistic medicine. It aims to cure not only the mind or the body but rather the soul and the spirit of the human being as well. And this is an important lesson for all of us even in our time. The plague described in this week's Torah reading may not actually be identifiable to us, but its moral lesson and spiritual value remains eternal and constructive in our time as well.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

Parshat Tazria-Metzora (Leviticus 12:1-15:33)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “Then he shall sprinkle [the mixture] seven times upon the person being purified from the tzara'at; he shall purify him and set the live bird free upon the open field” (Leviticus 14:7).

One of the strangest and most primitive-sounding rituals of the Bible surrounds the purification of the individual afflicted with “tzara'at,” a skin disease that apparently, at least in biblical times, struck those guilty of slanderous gossip (metzora – one who is afflicted with tzara'at derives from motzi-ra, one who spreads evil talk). Because the root cause of the malady was spiritual rather than physiological, it was the priest – the kohen – rather than a doctor who had the responsibility of examining the white spots that appeared on the skin of the individual to determine whether quarantine was necessary, and then –

if he was able to declare the person free of the disease – initiating a process of purification.

It is with this particular ritual that our portion of Metzora opens. The kohen commands two birds to be taken; the first to be slaughtered in an earthenware vessel, its blood mingled with the living waters of a spring, and the second – kept alive – to be immersed within the mingled blood waters in the earthenware vessel. The waters are sprinkled upon the person cured of the malady, whereupon the live bird is allowed to fly away, leaving the city limits.

This ritual act of purification is fraught with symbolism. There are few biblical infractions as serious as speaking slander; three different prohibitions recorded in Scripture proscribe such speech. The first is gossip regarding another, which may in itself be harmless, but which is no one else's business and can easily lead to evil talk (the prohibition of rechilut – when, for example, one tells another the cost of a neighbor's new house). The second is lashon hara – downright slander – reporting the negative action of another which may actually be true but ought not be spread.

The third and worst of all is motzi shem ra – disseminating a lie about an innocent person. From such unnecessary chatter, reputations can be broken, families can be destroyed and lives can be lost (“with the negative turn of their noses, they can become responsible for the death of another”).

Hence, three people incur penalty for such talk: the one who tells it, the one who listens to it and the one who spreads it further. And when the Kohen Gadol (high priest) appears once a year before God in the Holy of Holies with the incense sacrifice, it is for this infraction against slander that he seeks atonement on behalf of the Jewish nation.

With this in mind, let us analyze the symbolism of the purification process. In idolatry, the point of offering a sacrifice was to propitiate the gods – idolaters believed that the world was run by the warring gods and humans could only seek to bribe them. In Judaism, by contrast, humans are full partners with God in perfecting this world. Our sacrifices represent the one who brings them, with the sin-offering animal standing in the place of the owner, “telling” him that it is he who deserved to die but for Divine loving-kindness, and the whole burnt offering “telling” him that he ought devote “all of himself” to the service of the Almighty in the perfection of the world.

In the case of the metzora, the slanderous, scandalous chattering twitters are symbolized by the two birds; one is slaughtered as gossip is considered akin to taking a life, and the other is sent off to fly away. The best way to explain this symbolism is by means of a remarkable hassidic story told of someone who asked his rebbe how he might gain Divine forgiveness for his sin of slander. The rebbe instructed him to confess his sin and beg forgiveness of those whom he had slandered; then he instructed him to take a feather pillow, bring it to the marketplace late in the afternoon when the wind was strongest, to open the covering, allow the feathers to fly, and then set about collecting all the scattered feathers.

The distraught hassid returned to the rebbe that evening, reporting that gathering the feathers was a “mission impossible.” “So it is with slander,” replied the rebbe; “You never know how far your evil words have spread, since each person you told may well have told his friends...”

Rav Yisrael Salanter explained why the portions Tazria and Metzora follow Shmini, with its laws of kashrut: because what comes out of your mouth is even more significant than what goes into your mouth.

Eleanor Roosevelt is credited with saying this: “Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, small minds discuss people.”

Shabbat Shalom

The Power of Praise (Tazria-Metzora 5778)

Covenant & Conversation – Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
Judaism & Torah

From time to time couples come to see me before their wedding. Sometimes they ask me whether I have any advice to give them as to how to make their marriage strong. In reply I give them a simple suggestion. It is almost magical in its effects. It will make their

relationship strong and in other unexpected ways it will transform their lives.

They have to commit themselves to the following ritual. Once a day, usually at the end of the day, they must each praise the other for something the other has done that day, no matter how small: an act, a word, a gesture that was kind or sensitive or generous or thoughtful. The praise must be focused on that one act, not generalised. It must be genuine: it must come from the heart. And the other must learn to accept the praise.

That is all they have to do. It takes at most a minute or two. But it has to be done, not sometimes, but every day. I learned this in a most unexpected way.

I have written before about the late Lena Rustin: one of the most remarkable people I have ever met. She was a speech therapist specialising in helping stammering children. She founded the Michael Palin Centre for Stammering in London, and she had a unique approach to her work. Most speech therapists focus on speaking and breathing techniques, and on the individual child (those she worked with were on average around five years old). Lena did more. She focused on relationships, and worked with parents, not just children.

Her view was that to cure a stammer, she had to do more than help the child to speak fluently. She had to change the entire family environment. Families tend to create an equilibrium. If a child stammers, everyone in the family adjusts to it. Therefore if the child is to lose its stammer, all the relationships within the family will have to be renegotiated. Not only must the child change. So must everyone else.

But change at that basic level is hard. We tend to settle into patterns of behaviour until they become comfortable like a well-worn armchair. How do you create an atmosphere within a family that encourages change and makes it unthreatening? The answer, Lena discovered, was praise. She told the families with which she was working that every day they must catch each member of the family doing something right, and say so, specifically, positively and sincerely. Every member of the family, but especially the parents, had to learn to give and receive praise.

Watching her at work I began to realise that she was creating, within each home, an atmosphere of mutual respect and continuous positive reinforcement. She believed that this would generate self-confidence not just for the stammering child but for all members of the family. The result would be an environment in which people felt safe to change and to help others do so likewise.

I filmed Lena's work for a documentary I made for BBC television on the state of the family in Britain. I also interviewed some of the parents whose children she had worked with. When I asked them whether Lena had helped their child, not only did each of them say 'Yes' but they went on to say that she had helped save their marriage. This was extraordinary. She was, after all, not a marriage guidance counsellor but a speech therapist. Yet so powerful was this one simple ritual that it had massive beneficial side effects, one of which was to transform the relationship between husbands and wives.

I mention this for two reasons, one obvious, the other less so. The obvious reason is that the sages were puzzled about the major theme of Tazria-Metzora, the skin disease known as tsaraat. Why, they wondered, should the Torah focus at such length on such a condition? It is, after all, not a book of medicine, but of law, morality and spirituality.

The answer they gave was that tsaraat was a punishment for lashon hara: evil, hateful or derogatory speech. They cited the case of Miriam who spoke negatively about her brother Moses and was struck by tsaraat for seven days (Num. 12). They also pointed to the incident when at the burning bush Moses spoke negatively about the Israelites and his hand was briefly affected by tsaraat (Ex. 4:1-7).

The sages spoke more dramatically about lashon hara than any other offence. They said that it was as bad as committing all three cardinal sins: idolatry, incest and murder. They said that it kills three people: the one who says it, the one he says it about and the one who listens to it.[1] And in connection with Tazria-Metzora, they said that the punishment fitted the sin. One who speaks lashon hara creates dissension within the camp. Therefore his punishment as a metsora (a person stricken with tsaraat) was to be temporarily banished from the camp.[2]

So far, so clear. Don't gossip (Lev. 19:16). Don't slander. Don't speak badly about people. Judaism has a rigorous and detailed ethics of speech because it believes that "Life and death are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21). Judaism is a religion of the ear more than the eye; of words rather than images. God created the natural world with words and we create or damage the social world with words. We do not say, "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never harm me." To the contrary, words can cause emotional injuries that are as painful as physical ones, perhaps more so.

So Lena Rustin's rule of praise is the opposite of lashon hara. It is lashon hatov: good, positive, encouraging speech. According to Maimonides, to speak in praise of people is part of the command to "love your neighbour as yourself." [3] That is straightforward.

But at a deeper level, there is a reason why it is hard to cure people of lashon hara, and harder still to cure them of gossip in general. The American sociologist Samuel Heilman wrote an incisive book, *Synagogue Life*, about a Modern Orthodox congregation of which, for some years, he was a member. [4] He devotes an entire lengthy chapter to synagogue gossip. Giving and receiving gossip, he says, is more or less constitutive of being part of the community. Not gossiping defines you as an outsider. Gossip, he says, is part of "a tight system of obligatory exchange." The person who scorns gossip completely, declining to be either donor or recipient, at the very least "risks stigmatisation" and at the worst "excludes himself from a central activity of collective life and sociability." In short, gossip is the lifeblood of community.

Now, not only Heilman but probably every adult member of the community knew full well that gossip is biblically forbidden and that negative speech, lashon hara, is among the gravest of all sins. They also knew the damage caused by someone who gives more gossip than he or she receives. They used the Yiddish word for such a person: a yenta. Yet despite this, argued Heilman, the shul was in no small measure a system for the creation and distribution of gossip.

Synagogue Life was published 20 years before Oxford anthropologist Robin Dunbar's famous book, *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language*. [5] Dunbar's argument is that, in nature, groups are held together by devoting a considerable amount of time to building relationships and alliances. Non-human primates do this by "grooming," stroking and cleaning one another's skin (hence the expression, "If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours"). But this is very time-consuming and puts a limit on the size of the group.

Humans developed language as a more effective form of grooming. You can only stroke one animal or person at a time, but you can talk to several at a time. The specific form of language that bonds a group together, says Dunbar, is gossip – because this is the way members of the group can learn who to trust and who not to. So gossip is not one form of speech among others. According to Dunbar, it is the most primal of all uses of speech. It is why humans developed language in the first place. Heilman's account of synagogue life fits perfectly into this pattern. Gossip creates community, and community is impossible without gossip.

If this is so, it explains why the prohibitions against gossip and lashon hara are so often honoured in the breach, not the observance. So common is lashon hara that one of the giants of modern Jewry, R. Yisrael Meir ha-Cohen (the Chofetz Chaim) devoted much of his life to combatting it. Yet it persists, as anyone who has ever been part of a human group knows from personal experience. You can know it is wrong, yet you and others do it anyway.

This is why I found Lena Rustin's work to have such profound spiritual implications. Her work had nothing to do with gossip, but without intending to she had discovered one of the most powerful antidotes to lashon hara ever invented. She taught people to develop the habit of speaking well of one another. She taught them to praise, daily, specifically and sincerely. Anyone who uses Lena's technique for a prolonged period will be cured of lashon hara. It is the most effective antidote I know.

What is more, her technique transforms relationships and saves marriages. It heals what lashon hara harms. Evil speech destroys relationships. Good speech mends them. This works not only in marriages and families, but also in communities, organisations and businesses. So: in any relationship that matters to you, deliver praise daily. Seeing and praising the good in people makes them better

people, makes you a better person, and strengthens the bond between you. This really is a life-changing idea.
Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Some Applications of the Laws of Loshon hora

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

This article consists of two original shaylos that I wrote in Hebrew. These teshuvos are in the process of being edited for the next volume of Shu"t Nimla Tal, which, when ready, will be uploaded to the website RabbiKaganoff.com. Both teshuvos are germane to atypical questions I have been asked about the laws of loshon hora. The two questions were:

1. A therapist requesting guidance concerning what she should or should not say about a couple that she had counseled through a divorce.

2. Is it loshon hora to tell over something that the person himself is not embarrassed about and does in public? For example, when there is no reason for the other person to know (no to'eles), is it loshon hora to say that someone has extreme political positions that he himself espouses in public? Or, is it loshon hora to say that a woman does not dress according to halacha, when she appears in public this way?

The original Hebrew responsa were amusingly adapted into "English" by Google Translate and then reviewed by me and some very talented editors. Thanks for your forbearance. I suspect that many of our readers will find some of the discussion relating to both of these cases very surprising.

The first responsum is to a question asked by a psychiatric social worker. A couple had become divorced from a marriage in which both parties were unstable. The social worker asking the shaylah, who I happen to know is an excellent therapist, was their marriage therapist. She feels that, although the husband and wife were both at fault for the dissolution of the marriage, the ex-wife is not currently a candidate for future marriage, whereas the ex-husband could handle a future marriage, but only with professional involvement (that is, marital therapy) from the very beginning of the marriage and perhaps even earlier. What may the therapist answer someone who asks her about these individuals for a future marriage? Both members of the former couple have given her authorization to speak freely.

What follows is an approximate rendition of the teshuvah.

Firstly, I want to clarify the ex-husband's obligations to tell about his marital history to a future prospective mate or to a shadchan.

Until he is dating someone very seriously, he is not obligated to forewarn any woman whom he is dating about his previous difficulties and his need for pre-marital therapy. I advise that he tell a prospective bride after a certain number of dates, say three or four, at a point when the woman can evaluate fairly whether she wants to proceed. However, technically speaking, as long as he notifies her at a time that she can back out without creating a publicly embarrassing situation, he has not violated any halacha. In other words, he is not required to tell her until they are ready to become engaged.

Furthermore, he is under no obligation to tell a shadchan about any shortcomings.

In general, I would not recommend setting him up for a shidduch when it is fairly certain that the other party will back out of the shidduch upon hearing about his shortcomings and the necessity for marriage therapy. However, this is only if the shadchan happens to know about the background; as mentioned above, he is not obligated to tell a shadchan.

If the therapist is asked about his first marriage, she should say that what happened does not concern a different, new marriage. Regarding her assessment that, in a future marriage, the ex-husband should have counseling in advance, it is the ex-husband's obligation to tell the other party, not the counselor's. If the counselor is confident that he will follow instructions, both in terms of having therapy early in the relationship and in terms of his notifying the other party that this is necessary, she need not say anything. She is obligated to reveal this information only if she is concerned that the man will not tell.

Regarding the ex-wife, in the situation that happened, she was not emotionally prepared to consider dating for marriage, and therefore there was no issue for the therapist. Had the question been asked, I

would have told the therapist that if the young woman is not suitable for marriage, yet is pursuing shidduchin anyway, the therapist is responsible to tell those who call her what she professionally feels. It might be better if she can couch the information in a way that is potentially less damaging for the woman. For example, if she is asked about someone specific, she could say that, from her knowing the woman so intimately through therapy, she does not think that this shidduch should be pursued – that the woman needs a different type of man.

She is not required to reveal any information if she could lose her license or get into legal trouble as a result. Instead, she should say that she cannot discuss the matter for professional reasons or any other answer that is legally acceptable. She should not say something that is not true.

I want to share that the answer to this shaylah may vary significantly depending on the circumstances. There are certainly situations in which I would rule differently. This teshuvah is being discussed here only for general direction, and each particular case must be asked specifically.

The second question:

Is it forbidden to tell someone that a person does not observe certain halachos when the person about whom one is talking is not embarrassed or concerned about others finding out their level of observance? For example, may someone who is from an irreligious background tell someone else how far his family is from observing mitzvos when the person being told has no reason to know? Similarly, is it permitted to mention that a woman dresses immodestly in public when obviously she has no concerns that people know?

There is some interesting background to this question. I know a prominent posek who considers these conversations to be prohibited. I have challenged him on the subject, and believe that they are permitted -- subject to certain conditions, such as when revealing the information is not harmful to a third party. An example where this would not be permitted might be a case where revealing the information could be harmful to a grandchild, such as if acceptance to a school or a shidduch might be pre-empted because of the now-public knowledge of a grandparent's lack of observance. This would be prohibited because the Rambam (Hilchos Dei'os 7:5) states that it is loshon hora to say something that may cause harm to a third party, even when it does not reflect badly on him. (I am not judging whether the school or the potential shidduch policy is correct, or even whether it is halachically acceptable. Indeed, such school policy may be highly reprehensible. I am simply presenting the reality that an innocent party could be harmed because certain information is revealed.)

I have observed prominent poskim following the approach that it is permitted to say this without concerns for the prohibition of loshon hora. Furthermore, I contend that, according to the approach of the rav who rules that this is prohibited and considered loshon hora, someone who is opposed to Chassidim may not say that a person is chassidish; someone opposed to any form of Zionism is prohibited to refer to someone as Zionist, notwithstanding that the person about whom he is talking is quite proud to be chassidish or Zionist. The rav who disagrees with me indeed contends that these conversations constitute loshon hora if either the speaker or the listener considers this to be negative. I respectfully disagree and do not consider any of these conversations to be loshon hora.

I want to point out that the dispute here may be getting to a basic definition of what is the nature of the prohibition of loshon hora. It is quite clear from the Rambam's ruling that the prohibition includes sharing information that may harm someone, even if it is inherently not negative about them. Thus, it is fair to say that the prohibition of loshon hora is the harm it brings upon the person about whom it is said.

In the classic situations of loshon hora, when one shares negative information about a third party that the person being told has no need to know, the loshon hora is the negative feeling about this third party that the listening party now knows. Prior to hearing the loshon hora, he was unaware of this damaging information.

Thus, the dispute between myself and the other rav concerns the following: When the person himself is not at all concerned about people knowing that they have unusual beliefs, or that they believe in something that other people disdain, or that they do not consider

certain activities to be within the framework of what they are required to do, can there still be *loshon hora* to inform someone about this activity or belief. The other *rav* holds that the person's being unaware that his approach is mistaken does not change the fact that saying over the information constitutes *loshon hora*. I believe that I can demonstrate that, should the information not be harmful to a third party, it is not *loshon hora* when the person himself acts this way in public.

Here is the edited responsum that I sent him:

The Gemara (Arachin 16) states, "Rabbah bar Rav Huna said: Anything stated in the presence of three people is not a violation of *loshon hora*. This is because your friend has a friend, and his friend has a friend." Rashi explains the Gemara to mean that, once someone revealed information about himself in the presence of three people, it is not *loshon hora* to repeat this information to others because the revealer assumes that it will become common knowledge. By revealing it before three people, he has demonstrated that he is not concerned that others will find out. The listeners can assume that they have permission to share this information with others, which, had he not told it in the presence of three people, they would not be able to assume.

From this discussion we see that, once someone declares information about himself in public, he assumes that people will find out, and there is no longer any prohibition of *loshon hora*. Certainly, it follows that telling what someone does in public cannot involve any *loshon hora*.

However, a superficial reading of a passage of Gemara (Bava Metzia 58b) might lead one to the opposite conclusion. There the Gemara states that everyone whose misdeeds land him in Gehenna will ultimately be released, with the exception of three categories of sinners. One is someone who embarrasses his fellowman in public; another is someone who calls his fellowman by a derogatory nickname. The Gemara asks why we need two such similar categories – isn't someone who calls his fellowman by a derogatory nickname simply a subcategory of one who embarrasses his fellowman in public? The Gemara answers that the second category includes a situation in which the person is commonly called in public by the derogatory nickname. Rashi explains that, notwithstanding the fact that he is accustomed to the nickname and is no longer embarrassed by it, someone who intends to embarrass him by calling him by this nickname will not be released from Gehenna.

From this we see that, if one intends to embarrass someone, it is prohibited to say something even when it is well known. However, the Gemara passage implies that it is prohibited only when you speak in his presence and your intention is to embarrass him. In the instance of a woman who does not dress according to halachic standard, or someone who holds unconventional positions, when the person is not present, we have no evidence that informing a third party is prohibited. Furthermore, the discussion in Bava Metzia is not concerned about *loshon hora*, but of embarrassing someone. Therefore, calling someone by a derogatory nickname is forbidden because the person may be embarrassed. However, when someone is proud of what he is doing, even when the action is wrong according to halacha, there is no violation of *loshon hora* and presumably no violation of embarrassing them. This is even more so true when it is unclear whether the action is wrong.

Thus, we can reach the following conclusion: If one is trying to embarrass a woman who dresses improperly, it is forbidden to reprove her in public for her inappropriate attire. However, there is no prohibition in mentioning to a third party, when the woman is not present, that she dresses inappropriately, provided one does not exaggerate what she does wrong. Exaggerating would certainly be prohibited because one is spreading untruth about what she does.

Can we demonstrate from the story of Miriam that it is prohibited to say something truthful about a third party, regardless of their concern? After all, Miriam was punished for saying *loshon hora* about Moshe despite the fact that he was not concerned. She thought she was doing the correct thing, since she was convinced that Moshe was in error. The answer appears to be that what she did was *loshon hora* precisely because she was wrong. In other words, she thought she was planning an appropriate admonition of Moshe for his wrong activity, but since

his actions were correct and she was wrong, this constituted *loshon hora*, even though her violation was *beshogei*, inadvertent.

Thus, when the information qualifies as *loshon hora*, the prohibition is violated even if one did not realize that it is *loshon hora*. However, if the party himself acts or speaks in a way that the derogatory information is public knowledge, it is permitted to say it, provided one is not intending to embarrass anyone.

The *rav* who disputed with me feels that, if indeed the information is negative, even if the person himself does not consider it to be so, this may constitute *loshon hora*.

We are both in agreement that if the speaker said negative things about himself that might harm relatives or others, it is prohibited to repeat these negative things, as per the above-quoted Rambam.

I hope that our readers enjoy this presentation of *teshuvos* rendered in English.

Israel: The Heart of Judaism

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The following article by Rabbi Sacks was recently published in the inaugural edition of *HaMizrachi*, the new journal published by World Mizrachi.

Seventy years since the establishment of the modern State of Israel is a fitting moment to remind ourselves of a mystery at the heart of Judaism.

Why Israel? Why does the Hebrew Bible so resolutely and unerringly focus on this place, what Spinoza called a mere 'strip of territory'? The God of Abraham is the God of the whole world, a God unbounded by space. Why then does He choose any particular space, let alone one so small and vulnerable?

The question, 'Why Israel?' is the geographical way of asking 'Why the Jews?' The answer lies in the duality that defines Jewish faith and constitutes one of its most important contributions to civilization. Judaism embodies and exemplifies the necessary tension between the universal and the unique, between everywhere in general and somewhere in particular.

If there were only universals, the world would consist of empires, each claiming the totality of truth and each demonstrating that truth by attempting to conquer or convert everyone else. If there is only one truth, and you have it, then others do not. They are living in error. That has been the justification of many crimes in the course of history. If on the other hand there are only particulars – only a multiplicity of cultures and ethnicities with no universal moral principles to bind them – then the natural state of the world is a ceaseless proliferation of warring tribes. That is the risk today, in a post-modern, morally relativist world with ethnic conflicts, violence and terror scarring the face of many parts of the globe.

The Abrahamic covenant as understood by Judaism is the only principled way of avoiding these two scenarios. Jews belonged somewhere, not everywhere. Yet the God they worship is the God of everywhere, not just somewhere. So Jews were commanded to be neither an empire nor a tribe harbouring neither universal aspirations nor tribal belligerence. Theirs was to be a small land, but a significant one, for it was there, and there alone, that they were to live their destiny.

That destiny was to create a society that would honour the proposition that we are all created in the image and likeness of God. It would be a place in which the freedom of some would not lead to the enslavement of others. It would be the opposite of Egypt, whose bread of affliction and bitter herbs of slavery they were to eat every year on the festival of Passover to remind them of what they were to avoid. It would be the only nation in the world whose sovereign was God Himself, and whose constitution – the Torah – was His word.

Judaism is the code of a self-governing society. We tend to forget this, since Jews have lived in dispersion for two thousand years, without the sovereign power to govern themselves, and because modern Israel is a secular state. Judaism is a religion of redemption rather than salvation: it is about the shared spaces of our collective lives, not an interior drama of the soul, though Judaism, in the books of Psalms and Job, knows this as well.

The Jewish God is the God of love: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. You shall love

your neighbour as yourself. You shall love the stranger. The Hebrew Bible is a book suffused with love – the love of God for humanity, and the love of a people for God. All its tense emotions of anger and jealousy are part of the story of that often unreciprocated love.

But because Judaism is also the code of a society, it is also about the social emotions: righteousness (tzedeq/tzedakah), justice (mishpat), loving-kindness (chesed) and compassion (rachamim). These structure the template of biblical law, which covers all aspects of the life of society, its economy, its welfare systems, its education, family life, employer-employee relations, the protection of the environment and so on.

The broad principles driving this elaborate structure, traditionally enumerated as 613 commands, are clear. No one should be left in dire poverty. No one should lack access to justice and the courts. No family should be without its share of the land. One day in seven, everyone should be free. One year in seven, all debts should be cancelled. One year in fifty, all land that had been sold was to revert to its original owners. It was the nearest thing the ancient world had ever seen to an egalitarian society.

None of this was possible without a land. The sages said, 'Whoever lives outside Israel is as if he had no God.' Nachmanides in the thirteenth century said that 'the main purpose of all the commands is for those who live in the land of the Lord.' These are mystical sentiments but we can translate them into secular terms. Judaism is the constitution of a self-governing nation, the architectonics of a society dedicated to the service of God in freedom and dignity. Without a land and state, Judaism is a shadow of itself. God may still live in the heart, but not in the public square, in the justice of the courts, the morality of the economy, and the humanitarianism of everyday life.

Jews have lived in almost every country under the sun. In 4,000 years, only in Israel have they been able to live as a free, self-governing people. Only in Israel have they been able to construct an agriculture, a medical system, an economic infrastructure, in the spirit of the Torah and its concern for freedom, justice and the sanctity of life.

Only in Israel can Jews today speak the Hebrew of the Bible as the language of everyday speech. Only there can they live Jewish time within a calendar structured according to the rhythms of the Jewish year. Only in Israel can Jews once again walk where the prophets walked, climb the mountains Abraham climbed and to which David lifted his eyes. Israel is the only place where Jews have been able to live Judaism in anything other than an edited edition, continuing the story their ancestors began.

The reborn State of Israel in a mere 70 years has surely exceeded even the highest hopes of the early pioneers of the return to Zion, and this despite the fact that it has had to face almost ceaseless threats of war, terror, delegitimation and defamation. Despite all this, it stands as a living testimony to Moses' great command: "Choose life, that you and your children may live."

May the light of the State of Israel, which shines a little brighter each year, continue to be a blessing, not just to the Jewish people, but also to the world.

Drasha Parshas Tazria

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Holistic Healing

Tzora'as, the main discussion of the portions of Tazria and Metzora is an affliction that discolors human skin, clothing, hair, beards and even homes. The laws of tzora'as are detailed, complex and intricate. There are Talmudic tractates that deal with the proper procedure for purification and a litany of laws that must be followed flawlessly. The ramifications of tzora'as have more than physiological implications, they have a great theological impact as well.

The discoloration of skin does not necessarily reflect a chemical impropriety or a nutritional deficiency. It is a heavenly sign of a spiritual flaw, primarily related to a deficient speech pattern. It is a disease that afflicts a gossip. The one in question must go to the kohen (priest) who instructs him in the proper procedure to rid himself of both the blemish and the improper behavior that caused its appearance. The Torah tells us that the fate of the stricken man is totally dependent upon the will of the kohen. The kohen is shown the negah (blemish) and has the power to declare it tamei (impure) or

tahor (pure). In fact, even if all signs point to the declaration of impurity, if the kohen, for any reason deems the person tahor or refuses to declare him tamei, the man remains tahor. He is not tamei until openly and clearly labeled as such by the kohen.

Yet the verse seems a bit redundant. "And the kohen shall look at the negah affliction on the skin and behold it has changed to white and appears deeper than the skin of the flesh – it is a tzora'as and the kohen shall look at him and declare him tamei" (Leviticus 13:3). Why must the kohen look twice? The Torah should tell us that the kohen shall look at the negah, and if the affliction is white and appears deeper than the flesh of the skin, then the kohen shall declare him impure. What purpose is served by looking again?

Rabbi Abraham Twerski tells the story of a young man who came to the chief Rabbi of Vilna, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky with a request. As this young man's father was applying for a Rabbinical position in a town that the sage was familiar with, he asked the rabbi for a letter of approbation on his father's behalf.

Rabbi Grodzinsky felt that the candidate was not worthy of the position, but instead of flatly refusing, he just said that he would rather not mix into the Rabbinical affairs of another city and was sure that the council of that city would make a fair and wise decision.

Rabbi Grodzinsky did not realize the tirade that would be forthcoming. The young man began to spew insults and aspersions at him. The sage, however, accepted them in silence. After a few minutes of hearing the abusive language, Rabbi Grodzinsky excused himself and left the room.

Students who witnessed the barrage were shocked at the young man's brazen audacity. They were even more surprised that the Rav did not silence the young man at the start of the barrage.

Rabbi Grodzinsky turned to them. "You cannot view that onslaught on its own. You must look at the bigger picture. This young man was defending the honor of his father, and in that vein I had to overlook his lapse."

The kohen who is instructed to deal with the stricken individual should not only look at the negah. He must look again. He must look at the man. Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of D'vinsk explains that even if the negah has all the attributes that should lead to a declaration of tumah, there are other factors that must be weighed. If the man is a groom, about to wed, impurity must not be declared. It will ruin the upcoming festivities. If there are other mitigating circumstances, then a declaration of contagion must be postponed.

Perhaps the Torah is telling us more. It is easy to look at a flaw and declare it as such. But one must look at the whole person. He must ask himself "how is my declaration going to affect the future of this person." He must consider the circumstances that caused the negah. He must look again – once at the negah – and once at the man.

There are those who interpret the adage in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers), "judge all (of the) people in a good way," as do not look at a partial person: rather, judge all of the person — even a flaw may have a motivation or rationale behind it. The kohen may look at the negah, but before he pronounces tamei he must look again. He must look beyond the blemish. He must look at the man.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky

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For the week ending 21 April 2018 / 6 Iyyar 5778

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Insights

Boomerang

"...and he shall be brought to the kohen." (14:3)

When a person speaks lashon hara it indicates that he has no concept of the power of speech, that he considers words to be insignificant in comparison to actions. As the nursery rhyme says, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me."

Nothing could be further from the truth. When a person speaks evil he awakes a "prosecutor" in Heaven, not only against the target of his speech, but also against himself. An angel stands by the side of each of us, recording our every word. In order to teach those who speak slander the power of just one word, the Torah instructs that the offender be brought to the kohen. But, even as he is on his way to the

kohen, his body covered with tzara'at for all to see, until the kohen actually pronounces the word "Impure!" he is still considered pure. Similarly, he cannot regain his former status, although his disease has healed completely, until the kohen again pronounces him to be spiritually pure. From this we learn that the speaker of lashon hara is taught to reflect on the power of each and every word. For with one word he can be made an outcast, and with one word he can be redeemed.

Source: based on *Ohel Yaakov*

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OU Torah

Tazria-Metzora: Pinkus the Peddler

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

He was a character straight out of the novels of Charles Dickens. Scholars have long found Dickens' attitude toward Jews problematic. The character Fagin in the novel *Oliver Twist* is certainly a negative stereotype. But many are unaware of the character named Riah in Dickens' last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*. Riah is portrayed as a proud Jew, honest, wise, compassionate and courageous.

Pinkus always reminded me of Riah. He was a Holocaust survivor with no family, who eked out a livelihood by peddling his wares from door to door in Jewish neighborhoods. Such street peddlers were commonplace several generations ago, and he was among the last of them. He occasionally visited the Brooklyn neighborhood in which I grew up, but I knew him best from the lower East side where I went to yeshiva.

I no longer recall his real name, but we called him Pinkus because of a then-popular but now long-forgotten Yiddish song about Pinkus the Peddler.

We would buy our school supplies and other amenities from him, mostly out of sympathy. But those of us who had the patience to listen to his tales were more intrigued by his conversation than by the quality or price of his wares. Like Riah the Dickens character, he was proud, honest, wise, compassionate and courageous.

He discussed neither his Holocaust experiences nor his ultimate rescue. Rather, he plied us with riddles about the Bible and Talmud and was a treasure trove of anecdotes about the people he knew from what he called "my world which is no more."

Much later, I discovered another peddler in our own tradition, so that I no longer needed to identify just Pinkus with Riah. This peddler of old was one from whom not I, but none other than the Talmudic sage Rabbi Yannai, learned a great deal. And that brings us to the second parsha of this week's double Torah portion, *Tazria-Metzora*.

This week we will read in comprehensive detail about the *metzora*, the person inflicted with blemishes of the skin often translated as leprosy. In the Bible, and even more so in the Talmud and Midrash, these blemishes are seen as Divine punishment for sins of speech: malicious gossip, slander, and defamations of character – so much so that the very word *metzora* is said to be a contraction of the words "motzi ra," "he who spreads evil."

Hence the anecdote described in the Midrash *Rabbah* associated with this week's Torah portion:

It once happened that a certain peddler was wandering from town to town and crying out, "Who wishes to buy a life-giving potion?" Rabbi Yannai heard this man's shouting and called upon him for an explanation. The peddler took out the book of Psalms and showed Rabbi Yannai the verse: "Who is the person who desires life, loving each day to see good? Then guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."

Rabbi Yannai exclaimed, "All my life I have been reading this verse and never quite understood what it meant, until this peddler came and explained it... Therefore, Moses admonished the Jewish people and said to them these are the statutes of the 'metzora,' the statutes of the 'motzi shem ra,' the bearer of malicious gossip."

From time immemorial, commentators have struggled with the question, "What did the peddler say that Rabbi Yannai did not already know?" Rabbi Yannai, by his own testimony, had read the book of Psalms many times. The meaning of the verses quoted seems to be

self-evident. What could this peddler have added to Rabbi Yannai's understanding?

Permit me to share with you one approach to demystifying this passage in the Midrash. It is drawn from a work by Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, a very insightful 20th century rabbi who lived and wrote in Israel. He reminds us of a teaching by Maimonides to the effect that there are similarities between physical health and illness and moral health and illness.

Taking that analogy further, Rabbi Zevin reminds us that there are foods for healthy people which those who are ailing can simply not digest. They need to first ingest medicine, healing foods, before they are ready for a proper diet.

Similarly, before one can embark upon the proper moral life, he or she often needs to first be healed from a prior tainted moral status. Thus, before one can live a life of "turning from evil and doing good; seeking peace and pursuing it," which is a normal healthy moral life, it is often necessary to first wean himself from habitual immoral practices which are typically very resistant to change.

Hence the ingenious insight of the peddler Rabbi Yannai heard. "Do you want to know the secret of a long life? Of a properly lived life of doing good and pursuing peace? Then first you must guard your tongue from evil. That is the secret potion, the healing medicine which will enable you to go on to the next step, moral health."

In this analysis, correcting one's patterns of speech is a therapeutic process, a life-giving potion; not a food, not the bread of life.

Only after this pernicious but pervasive fault is corrected, only after this moral disease is cured, can a person actively engage in the next verse in Psalms: "Turn from evil and do good..."

Rabbi Yannai was accustomed to reading these verses differently. He understood the question, "Who desires life?" But he thought that there was one compound answer: guard your tongue, turn from evil, and do good.

The peddler taught something much more profound. The answer to "Who desires life?" is a complex one. It consists of stages, the first of which is a healing process acquired by ingesting the potion of good speech. Then one can move up to the next stage, living a full and healthy moral life.

Pinkus the peddler taught me a lot when I was but a teenager. What I did not realize then was that he was following a long and honored tradition of itinerant peddlers who peddled not just trivial commodities, but words and wares of wisdom.

Rav Yissocher Frand - Parshas Tazria

"Something Like a Blemish..."

These *divrei Torah* were adapted from the *hashkafa* portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's *Commuter Chavrusah Tapes* on the weekly portion: CD #1028 – Davening Maariv Early: Does it Make it Tomorrow? Good Shabbos!

"Something Like a Blemish has Appeared on My House" – Why State it Like That?

In *Parshas Metzora* [Vayikra 14:34], the Torah introduces the laws of *tzara'as ha'bayis* ["*tzara'as* of the House"], which applies "when you come to the Land of Canaan that I am giving you as an inheritance." These *halachos* are known as "*Nigei Batim*." *Tzara'as* can appear on a person's body, it can appear on garments, or it can appear on the walls of one's house.

The blemishes that appear on the walls of one's house are the "first stage" of *tzara'as* contamination. Chazal say that *tzara'as* is not merely a physical ailment. It has a physical manifestation, but it is in fact a spiritual disease. Consequently, it is not to be translated as "leprosy," which is a totally physical ailment. This is a spiritual ailment which causes physical symptoms. In many places, Chazal say that *tzara'as* comes as a punishment for something a person is doing wrong (for example *Eruchin* 15b). It is a message from the *Ribono shel Olam*.

Chazal say that the first time the *Ribono shel Olam* sends the message, He has Mercy and puts the *tzara'as* on a person's house (further removed from a person than his body or his clothing). If the person does not get the message, then the *Ribono shel Olam* sends the message "a little closer to home" and the person finds the message on

his garments. If he still does not get the message, his very body is afflicted with the terrible disease of Tzara'as.

The person who finds such blemishes on his walls goes to the Kohen and tells him "something that looks like a blemish (k'negah) has appeared on my house." Rashi (alluding to a Mishna we will quote in a moment) inquires why the testimony of the homeowner is given in the form of "something that looks like a blemish" (k'negah). Why not make a definitive statement: I have a blemish on the walls of my house? Rashi comments: "Even a Torah scholar who knows for sure that it is a negah should not rule definitively that it is in fact Tzara'as, but rather should use the tentative form, "it appears to me as something like a negah on my home."

This is based on a Mishna in Tractate Negaim [12:5]. Even a Talmid Chochom who knows the laws of tzara'as thoroughly, and has no doubt whatsoever that the blemish on his walls is House Tzara'as, may not say those words. Rather, he goes to the Kohen [Priest] and says "K'negah nir'ah li ba'bayis" — something like a blemish appears to me to be on my house.

Why is this so? Normally, a bona fide Torah scholar may pasken his own shaylos. Why can't the Talmid Chochim rule in this case? The Tosfos Yom Tov on the Mishnayos in Tractate Negaim [12:5] quotes four reasons why a person should not definitively say, "A negah has appeared on my house."

Number One: The Tosfos Yom Tov cites Rav Eliyahu Mizrachi (in the name of his teachers), who says that this is an example of the Rabbinic saying, "Teach your mouth to utter the expression, 'I don't know.'" Chazal instruct us that we need to develop habits that will keep us from becoming too confident that we are always right. Even if someone is 99% sure that he does know something for a fact, the Rabbis urge him: "Don't be so sure of yourself!"

Number Two: The Tosfos Yom Tov himself explains that this is a matter of Derech Eretz [appropriate etiquette] of how a person should interact with the Kohen. The homeowner may be a Talmid Chochom. He may know the law. But the halacha is that it is not up to him to pasken such a shaylah. When it comes to tzara'as ha'bayis, only the Kohen can rule that the house is tameh or tahor. It is a simple matter of courtesy that no one should go to the Kohen and tell him presumptuously, "It's a nega!" Protocol is that the Kohen will tell you whether it is a nega or not! That is his jurisdiction. Derech Eretz l'Kohen.

Number Three: The Tosfos Yom Tov also gives a practical reason for a Talmid Chochom homeowner to be tentative in his initial meeting with the Kohen. If he says to the Kohen definitively, "I have a nega in my house" this may influence the Kohen's ruling. You might intimidate him — because of your reputation as a scholar and Talmid Chochom — to automatically go along with whatever you say, thus forfeiting the possibility that he may justifiably determine that the blemish on the house is not Tzara'as. It is better to be tentative and say "k'negah (a blemish-like appearance) has shown up on my house," rather than paint the Kohen into a corner, such that he has no choice but to declare your house under quarantine as Tameh.

Number Four: Finally, the Tosfos Yom Tov suggests that the issue at hand reflects the principle, "Do not open your mouth (to give suggestions) to the Satan." The Talmud advises us not to say things which the Satan may turn into a reality. If you say, "I have a tzara'as blemish in my house," the Satan can give you what you ask for, so to speak, and the blemish on your walls will be found to be tzara'as.

After presenting these four reasons, the Tosfos Yom Tov asks a basic question: Why is this concept only found by nigei batim [House blemishes]? Why doesn't the halacha teach that if he has a tzara'as sign on his clothes he should go to the Kohen and say, "A nega-like appearance has shown up on my garment!?" We do not have any such halacha. Likewise, if a person has tzara'as on his arm, we never find that the appropriate protocol is to tell the Kohen, "Something like a nega has appeared on my body!"

The Tosfos Yom Tov feels this is such a strong question, that in fact he concedes the premise of the question. Although the Torah only says this halacha by House Tzara'as, indeed the same procedure should be followed by anyone struck with either Garment Tzara'as or Body Tzara'as as well. (He admits that this is not how the halacha is codified in the Rambam, and he gives a lengthy explanation to deal with that issue.)

Let's assume, however, that the Tosfos Yom Tov's novel answer is not correct, and that this requirement is only necessary in the case of House Tzara'as. The question remains: Why is that so?

The Tolner Rebbe raises this question. Furthermore, the Tolner Rebbe broadens the question: If someone has a ritual question involving a mixture of milk and meat food substances (for example, someone stuck a fleishege spoon into a milchege soup), have we ever heard that proper protocol is to go to the Rov and tell him, "Maybe I have a shayla of basar b'chalav [ritual question involving meat and milk]? If someone has a chicken with a broken bone and is not sure if the bone broke before shechita [ritual slaughtering] (and the animal is therefore non-Kosher) or the bone broke after shechita (and the shechita was thus done on a healthy animal, and it is Kosher), has anyone ever questioned the propriety of the shochet's making a definite statement: "I have a problematic broken bone in the chicken I just slaughtered"? Of course not!

The questioner can make a definitive statement to the Rabbi about the non-Kosher status of the item he is questioning. If the Rov believes the questioner is in error, he will tell him he made a mistake. We are not concerned with matters of protocol, or "don't open your mouth to Satan," and the like. In no other area of halachic inquiry does the questioner need to couch his question in tentative terms like "k'negah nir'ah li ba'bayis" — something like a blemish appears to me to be on my house.

The Tolner Rebbe explains the matter as follows:

Negaim are a message from the Ribono shel Olam. When you have a "nega" on your walls, the Almighty is trying to tell you that something is wrong with your house. He is not merely trying to tell you that there is something wrong with your physical domain. "Bayis," in Jewish lore, is the place where one raises his children, where he educates his family. When someone finds a "nega" in his "Bayis," the Almighty is telling him that something is wrong with the way he is raising his children. Nigei Batim are about the institution of the Jewish home (Bayis).

The Bayis is the basic building block of the Jewish Nation, as we find in Egypt: "...They should take for themselves every man a lamb for his father's household, a lamb for each Bayis." [Shemos 12:3] A blemish on the Bayis means you are building defective building blocks for the Jewish nation. Something is wrong with the chinuch [education] going on in this house. The defect may be in one of four areas:

Do not say "a negah has definitively appeared in my house" because you should teach your tongue to utter the expression "I don't know." Don't be so sure of yourself! Don't let your children get the impression that you know all the answers. That is not good chinuch. As much as it is necessary to portray oneself as the head of the household, it is not embarrassing for a person to say I don't know or at least I am not sure. When your child asks you a question in hashkafa for which you don't know the answer, do not say "We don't ask such questions." Don't tell him "That's a silly question." Under those circumstances, you should tell your child "I don't know." This is an example of a "k'negah nir'ah li ba'bayis" attitude.

The second thing that may be wrong with your chinuch is the way you treat people that are not as chashuv [important] as you. You are a distinguished Torah scholar. You wrote a sefer on the Laws of Tzara'as. You know the intricacies of the law backwards and forwards. Now you have a blemish on your walls. Your next-door neighbor is a Kohen who is an ignoramus. He does not know the difference between terumah and ma'aser. He knows nothing! "I must go to such an ignorant priest and ask him a question — does this qualify as a nega or not?" Outrageous! What does he know? But, the Mishna insists this is what he must say: "Something like a nega has appeared on the walls of my house." A person needs to show derech ertz to everyone. The greatest scholar has no right to lord it over anybody. Teach your children that just because you may be wealthier or smarter or have more illustrious ancestry, that does not exempt you from showing common courtesy and manners towards your humbler neighbors and acquaintances.

The third reason the Tosfos Yom gave is that if you say definitively "a nega has appeared on my walls," you may unduly influence the Kohen. Some people, by virtue of their personal charisma, are overwhelming personalities. There is an expression regarding such

people, “He takes all the oxygen out of the room.” This is as if to say “There is no room to breathe after this guy opens his mouth.” Imagine such a homeowner telling the Kohen, “There is a nega in my house.” The Kohen says to himself “Am I going to argue with him?” It is great to have influence and it is great to have charisma, but it stifles a person’s children’s own independence of thought. This too can negatively impact the chinuch in the home. The father’s overpowering personality does not give his children a chance to develop into who they really are, on their own.

The fourth reason why a person must say “k’nega nir’ah li ba’bayis” is so that he does not “open his mouth to the Satan.” A person who has such a negative view of life that everything looks black, and everything is no good, cannot positively influence his children. A person who has the pervasive attitude, “I know nothing; I am a rag; I can’t do anything right, etc.” also provides poor chinuch. Without at least portraying a modicum of self-confidence, he spreads a contagious inferiority complex to his offspring. They also grow up thinking of themselves as “nothings.” A person is not supposed to consider himself a “nothing.”

The Chassidic Rebbeim teach that this is why man has two pockets (on either side of his pants). In one pocket, he must keep a slip of paper with the pasuk, “I am dust and ashes.” [Bereshis 18:27]; in the other pocket, he must keep a slip of paper with the pasuk, “For my sake the world was created” [Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5]. This is teaching that each person must achieve an appropriate balance between haughtiness and humility. Too much haughtiness is no good; but if a person is too modest about himself and thinks of himself as a shmoteh [rag] and acts like a shmoteh — this is also improper, and will provide an improper role model to his children.

This is why this unique halacha of “k’negah nir’eh li baBayis” is only mentioned in connection with blemishes in the Bayis (Nigei Batim). This is a lesson about the type of Bayis that every Jew is supposed to have. Regarding all other areas — niddah, nevelah, basar b’cholov, hilchos Pessach, hilchos Shabbos, and so on — there is no such halacha that a person needs to enquire of the posek with such tentative questions. Only where we are talking about correcting a flaw in the Jewish Bayis (such as education of children that begins within the family unit, Bayis), only here do we have the pedagogic requirement to tentatively approach the Kohen with the statement, “Something like a blemish has appeared on the walls of my house.”

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parshas
Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parashas Tazria-Metzora
פרשת תזריע-מצורע תשע"ה

וטמא טמא יקרא

He is to call out: “Contaminated, contaminated!” (13:45)

The metzora, individual afflicted with a spiritually-originated form of leprosy, is isolated. In an effort to safeguard people from coming in contact with him, he must warn people to stay away by calling out: “Contaminated, contaminated!” Chazal (Moed Kattan 5a) offer another reason for his declaration of spiritual contamination. Letting people know of his circumstances, informing them of his pain, will motivate them to pray for his recovery. A homiletic rendering of the pasuk is very appropriate and practical. V’tamei, one who is himself contaminated – ie, one who is a victim of his own shortcomings – will make a point to call out others concerning their failings. In other words, one who is himself tamei will identify others as tamei. We tend to defray attraction from ourselves by calling attention to others. Alternatively, the fellow who makes note of another person’s faults is probably himself guilty of these very same faults.

The Imrei Emes of Gur supplemented this exposition with a powerful insight from the Yalkut Shimoni (Tehillim 8:31). One of the musical instruments used in the Bais Hamikdash was the neivai, lyre. (The name is “interesting” in the sense that it is related to: naval, abomination; neveilah, carcass; in short, it is a term of degradation.) The Yalkut explains that it is considered to be neivai because it is menaveil, degrades all other instruments (since its sound is so superior

to that of any other musical instrument). If so, notes the Rebbe, it should be called menaveil, not neivai.

The Rebbe’s explanation goes to the core of human nature and character. One who – even by default – makes others look bad, who diminishes the stature of his fellow, who rises to glory at the expense of his friend, himself has a deficient character. We are to “make it” on our own volition – not on the shoulders and backs of others. Tamei – tamei yikra – he who is himself contaminated will be the first to expose the deficiencies of others.

In the world of psychology, this is called “rankism.” It typically takes on the form of putting others down. Indeed, rankism is probably at the root of most man-made suffering. While we often excuse it as human nature, as a way of saying that we have no way of overcoming it, it does not change the fact that rankism is an ugly and mean character deficiency, which focuses on subordinating and exploiting the weakness of others. It is (in the opinion of some psychologists) the residue of predation, survival of the fittest, the “we are at the top of the food chain,” attitude that once prevailed. While then we (as a society) preyed on those weaker than we were, today we simply put down those who are in our way. This may be a societal norm (because society is not normal), but it goes against the very basics of Torah. Life is about dignity in serving Hashem, in glorifying Him. Dignity that is derived at the expense of others is shameful and degrading; it is the direct opposite of what Hashem asks of us. Imagine if a child would attempt to get into the good graces of his/her parent at the expense and the pain of his/her sibling. Is this any different?

Veritably, those who put others down are often too shallow to recognize and acknowledge their own shortcomings. It is easier to paint others in a negative light than to look in the mirror and see the truth about oneself. I once heard a meaningful quote from an author whose name has slipped my mind: “Blowing out someone else’s candle does not make yours shine any brighter.” Our function is to worry about and address our own positive and negative qualities, to work on creating ourselves, to become holier Jews. Rather than pulling someone down so that we can reach the top, we should help those in need. By helping others, we become better people. How much happier we would be if, rather than focusing on the negative aspects of others, we would work on building our own positive qualities.

כל ימי אשר הנגה בו יטמא טמא הוא כדד ישב מחוץ למחנה מושבו
All the days that the affliction is upon him, he shall remain impure; he is impure. He shall stay in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (13:46)

Not only must the metzora be isolated from pure, healthy people, but even those who are also impure are to be isolated from him (Rashi). The commentators debate concerning the identity of these impure ones to whom Rashi refers. Some say this refers to individuals who are in a severe state of impurity, such as those who have been in contact with the dead. They are not banished from all three camps – as are those who are afflicted with tzaraas. Others contend that Rashi refers to other metzoraim, who may not stay together outside all three camps. Rashi explains why there is such stringency with regard to the metzora’s punishment. The metzora’s lashon hora, slanderous tongue, caused a parting between a husband and wife, between a man and his colleague; he, too, shall be set apart. Malicious talk creates a rift – even though the report may be far-fetched and is probably not true. People begin to wonder, however, why he is saying this. It must be that there is some truth to his allegations. By the time the person discovers that it was nothing more than vicious slander and totally unfounded, it is too late. The damage has already been done. (More often than not, the relationship will never be the same. Recrimination sets in, since, after all, “Why did you believe slander about me,” etc?)

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, supplements this with his own pragmatic explanation. It is very difficult to guard oneself from lashon hora, because not always is the lashon hora – ra, evil – or prohibited. In some instances, one does not only not have to refrain from speaking, but it might even be a mitzvah, positive, good deed to speak lashon hora! Let us take a standard (all too occurring) case, in which a simple, timid, unknowing friend is about to partner – or enter into a business deal – with someone whom we know with complete certainty is unscrupulous. Our friend is about to lose his savings for which he slaved for years. Is there a question as to what our reaction to this ill-fated partnership should be? Certainly, we must warn our friend to stay away and not close the deal. Is this considered to be lashon hora?

Furthermore, we observe a friend about to enter into a shidduch, matrimony, with an individual (boy or girl) who has been trouble. (Everyone claims that change has occurred. He/she is not the same person. It might be true, so you take him/her for your son/daughter.) At times, to remain silent is tantamount to transgressing the prohibition of La saamod al dam reicha, “Do not stand on the blood of your fellow; do not stand idly by as your

friend's blood is being spilled." Who would want to assume such responsibility?

Interestingly, the sin of lashon hora is perhaps one of the most vile transgressions that one can commit. Yet, when it comes to rendering a halachic decision/perspective on the appropriateness (or even mitzvah) of a given comment, we do not hesitate to render our judgment. We immediately (or, after some seemingly justified validation) pasken, decide, that what we are about to say is one hundred percent permissible. Why is this? If it is such a great sin, we should shudder to offer our opinion regarding its authorization.

When a drop of milk falls into a pot of meat, are we so quick to render our halachic opinion? Who would take a chance? Why is it that, regarding the sin of slander, we do not ask the Rav for a halachic ruling if we may speak? Lashon hora can be more devastating than profaning Shabbos. Slander can kill, destroy lives, break relationships. Yet, we have no shailos, halachic queries. Why is this? What is it about slander that is so tempting that a person is prepared to throw it all away just to malign his fellow?

I came across a story which I think sheds some light on the above. A student in Yeshivas Slabodka approached the Rosh Yeshiva and posed the following question: "I have fallen victim to the sin of lashon hora. No matter what I do, I always end up speaking lashon hora. What should I do? It is a taavah, passion, that I seem unable to control. Can the Rosh Yeshiva counsel me in order to break the hold the yetzer hora has over me."

The Rosh Yeshiva, Horav Aizik Sher, zl, listened intently and then spoke. "You know, your father visited with me last week. We had a wonderful time together. Indeed, your father is truly a distinguished man. By the way, are you able to speak lashon hora against your father? Does your yetzer hora come into play when it concerns your father?"

"No, I have no yetzer hora whatsoever to speak against my father," the student replied.

"Do you feel that, with regard to your father, you are able to overcome the challenge of speaking lashon hora?" the Rosh Yeshiva asked. "Absolutely not. It is no challenge at all. I simply have no taavah, desire, to speak ill of my father," the student reiterated.

"Why is this? What is there about your father (or your relationship with him) that precludes your speaking negatively about him?"

"Not only do I not speak against my father – if I ever hear anything negative about him, I become so angry that I am unable to speak until I do something about it!" the student emphasized.

"So then, what is it? What is the key to this anomaly?" The young man replied, "I love my father! I would never speak ill of him!"

"If this is the case, you have the solution to your problem concerning lashon hora. If you would learn to love your fellow, your desire to speak lashon hora would dissipate. It is all about caring about your fellow," said the Rosh Yeshiva.

This is why we speak lashon hora. There is a smoldering ember of animus within us that hates, and this disdain provokes us to lose control of our senses and speak lashon hora. The only solution to the problem is to train ourselves to like, to love, to care, to put our fellow before ourselves – only then are we protected against the scourge of lashon hora.

Parashas Metzora

זאת תהיה תורת המצרע

This shall be the law of the metzora. (14:2)

The term metzora is comprised of the construct motzi-ra, brings out bad (about his fellow). This is a baal lashon hora. The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh teaches that one who speaks negatively about his fellow is still called a baal lashon hora, even if what he says is the truth. When one sins, he is called a baal aveirah, baal lashon hora; the word baal means husband of. Why is this? Furthermore, when a boy reaches the age of thirteen, he is called a bar-mitzvah, bar, meaning son of. With regard to mitzvos, one is called a son, while concerning one's relationship with sin, he is considered a sort of husband to the sin.

This question was posed by one of the speakers at the bar-mitzvah celebration held in honor of a member of the family of the Chiddushei HaRim. Why is a sinner called baal, and one who enters the yoke of mitzvos referred to as bar? The speaker explained (quoted by Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, in Niflaosecha Asicha) that with regard to mitzvos we are considered children (of), since we do not separate ourselves from our parents. Hashem is our Heavenly Father. Through mitzvah observance we remain close. Thus, one who studies/devotes himself to a life of Torah is called a ben, son of, (the) Torah.

One's relationship with sin is in converse. It is not an inextricable bond. One can tear it asunder through teshuvah, repentance. Just like a husband's bond can be severed through divorce, we are able to separate ourselves from the clutches of sin

through repentance, so that we are able to return to Hashem. One who repents is called a baal teshuvah, because the process of repentance is not an easy one to achieve, while remaining connected. To achieve the pinnacle of repentance to the point that one can say that he has fulfilled the mitzvah of teshuvah is a difficult – yet attainable – climb.

Why is one who has a physical blemish (Kohen who is not permitted to serve in the Bais Hamikdash) called a baal mum?? The speaker explained that one day, with the advent of the geulah sheleimah, ultimate and complete Final Redemption, everyone will be healed as they were at Har Sinai. There will no longer be any baalei mum.

זאת תהיה תורת המצרע ביום טהרתו

This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification. (14:2)

We no longer have the affliction/purification process of tzaraas, spiritual leprosy. This is the consequence of a degraded spiritual condition. Degradation applies at a time and circumstance in which our people are on an elevated moral standing, so that the failing is noticeable in contrast to the spiritual status we are expected to maintain. Since we lost our Bais Hamikdash and our spirituality plummeted, we have no longer been on the spiritual plateau deserving of such a manifestation. To put it in simple terms, the term "sick" applies to one who is otherwise healthy. Likewise, in spiritual health, one must be spiritually robust in order for the affliction to manifest a contrast.

We find that David Hamelech prayed that one who recites Tehillim be considered as if he were occupied in the laws of negaim and ohalos, spiritual afflictions and areas of spiritual contamination and purity. These are one of the most difficult areas of Torah law. To achieve erudition in the laws of negaim and ohalos demands much toil and devotion to studying the subject. Reciting Tehillim does not seem to be that demanding. How are these two connected?

Horav David, zl, m'Tolna, explains that negaim distinguish themselves in the fact that tumah and taharah – rendering of spiritual defilement or purity – are determined by the Kohen and dependent upon his articulation of the word: tamei. Tumah and taharah must be vocalized by the Kohen. This is the case even if the Kohen was unnerudite and not fluent in the laws of negaim, even if the Kohen were not in complete control of his faculties, a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, conversant in the laws. Even if such a Kohen is asked to render his opinion, the actual pronunciation of "tamei" must be delivered by the Kohen, who might – in such a situation – be clueless to the proceedings. Such a Kohen knows not what he is saying, because he is unaware of the law. Yet, his enunciation of the word "tamei" renders the afflicted person a metzora.

This is what David Hamelech requested of Hashem. When a Jew pours out his heart in the recitation of Tehillim – even if he knows not what he is saying – ie. he does not understand the profundity of the words that he is reciting – it should be as effective as the Kohen's elocution of the word "tamei." Just reading the words of Tehillim with sincerity should be able to arouse Heavenly compassion, so that whatever decree hangs over us is rescinded. We now have some idea of the sanctity of the "words" of Sefer Tehillim.

וצוה הכהן ולקח למטהר שתי צפרים חיות טהרות

The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified, there shall be taken two live, clean birds. (14:4)

Rashi explains why fowl are used as the korbanos, sacrifices, to effect atonement for the metzora. Negaim, afflictions/plagues, are the punishment meted out against one who speaks lashon hora, slanderous speech, which is the result of pitpotei devarim, verbal twittering. Thus, one who "tweeters" around, talking about people and their activities, inevitably ends up speaking ill of others. Veritably, the one safe way to guarantee that one not speak lashon hora is to refrain from speaking altogether! People get sucked into saying something negative – even when their original intent had been to speak positively.

Shlomo Hamelech says (Koheles 9:12), "For a person knows not his time (when he will be called to answer for his actions, ie. day of death), like fish who are seized by a bad trap." The Midrash comments: "Are there such things as a 'bad' trap and a 'good' trap? (A trap is a trap, and when the creature is caught, it is over regardless. What difference does it make if the trap is good or bad?) Reish Lakish says, 'This (bad trap) refers to a baited fishing line.'"

There are two types of traps (for catching fish). One form of trap is a net, whereby the fisherman spreads his net over the water and the unsuspecting fish swims right into it. In this instance, the entire fish is caught, trapped in the net. The second form of trap is the fishing line with a bait around a hook. The fish bites into the bait, unaware of the hook that will ensnare it. The fish falls for the tempting bait, takes a bite and suddenly realizes that its mouth has been punctured by the hook. The fish is trapped – but may not realize

it, since the rest of its body seems to have free rein to swim around. The fish may not be trapped inside of the net, and it may have freedom to move, but it is no less trapped than the fish inside the net.

Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, explains that two types of yetzer hora, evil inclination, seek to ensnare us. In one case, a person scoffs at everything: Shabbos, Yom Tov, Kosher, Tefillin, Torah study. From the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, he has rebuffed and thrown off the yoke of Heaven from himself. He is completely ensnared, totally subjugated to the wiles of the yetzer hora.

In contrast is the fellow who does it all: rises early to daven; studies Torah whenever he has an available moment; observes Shabbos with all of its stringencies; observes kashrus – the works. The man is the epitome of religious observance, the poster boy for Orthodoxy. He has one issue, however, one area in which the yetzer hora seems to dominate his life: his mouth; he enjoys speaking lashon hora. Of course, it is not the “real,” course, ugly kind of slander; rather, it is “meaningful” and meant to prove a point – even to inspire others. Such a person is no less a victim of the yetzer hora than his non-observant counterpart. In fact, he is worse, since he does not realize that he is a victim. After all, he is still swimming around. He (thinks that he) is not trapped. This is a bad trap. One thinks that he is pious and virtuous, but he is actually an unethical, evil person who has no qualms about destroying his fellow with the slander that spews from his mouth. It is this trap that destroyed our Bais Hamikdash and prevents it from being rebuilt. When brother hates brother unwarrantingly, when controversy and slander are a way of life, the Bais Hamikdash will not be returned to us. The fellow that is ensnared by the bait, with his mouth stuck on the fishing line’s hook, yet feels that he is free because he can swim around, is the one who is in serious trouble.

Veritably, as Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, observes, no one (observant) really speaks lashon hora with intent. In fact, if one were to offer a monetary reward for lashon hora, there would be no takers – regardless of the enormity of the sum. When confronted with an aveirah, transgression, no G-d-fearing Jew will intentionally sin. So, what happens? It is unintentional. In the heat of a discussion, people forget, and, before they know it, they have just besmirched another Jew’s reputation. It is like the fish that is swimming in the water, minding its own business, when all of a sudden it sees a juicy worm. It opens its mouth to grab the worm, and – too late – the hook has caught its mouth. That is lashon hora. The juicy worm is the bait. We are stuck on the hook.

Va’ani Tefillah

השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה – Hashivah shofteinu k’varishonah. Restore our Judges as before.

Eliyahu HaNavi received semichah, ordination, from Achiah HaShiloni. With his advent, prior to heralding the coming of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, he will ordain the elders of the generation as the Sanhedrin. Eliyahu will then transmit to them the Torah She’Baal Peh, Oral Law, as he received it from Achiah HaShiloni. This Torah will be free of any debate or dispute. Thus, as Chazal foreshadowed, he will establish peace in the world, the Redemption will begin, and the Throne of David Hamelech will be reestablished (Yeoras Devash).

What is the significance of restoring the Sanhedrin once again (other than the obvious reason that there will be clarity in Torah through one ruling judicial system)? With the restoration of the Sanhedrin, the judges will be authorized to sentence a guilty person to malkos, flogging, thus absolving him from Heavenly punishment – even kareis, Heavenly excision. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 26:14) teaches: “If one is sentenced on earth, he is requited in Heaven,” which implies that Divine justice is suspended when the assembly of judges on earth pass judgment.

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Ohr Somayach :: Insights Into Halacha

For the week ending 21 April 2018 / 6 Iyyar 5778

Parashah Permutations 5778

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

This time of year is an interesting one. For the next month or so, the Jewish world will not be aligned. No, I am not referring to constellations, but rather to the weekly parashah. A simple innocuous question of “What’s this week’s parashah?” will elicit a different response depending on where in the world the question is being asked.

This is because the parashah will not be the same regularly scheduled one in Chutz La’aretz as it is in Eretz Yisrael.

Truthfully, this type of dichotomy actually happens not so infrequently, as it essentially occurs whenever the last day of a Yom Tov falls on Shabbos. In Chutz La’aretz where Yom Tov Sheini is halachically mandated,[1] a Yom Tov Krias HaTorah is publicly leined; yet, in Eretz Yisrael (unless by specific Chutznik minyanim)[2] the Krias HaTorah of the next scheduled parashah is read. This puts Eretz Yisrael a parashah ahead until the rest of the world soon ‘catches up’, by an upcoming potential double-parashah, which each would be read separately in Eretz Yisrael.

The reason for this current interesting phenomenon is that this year [5778 / 2018] the eighth day of Pesach, observed only outside Eretz Yisrael, fell out on a Shabbos. On this Shabbos / Yom Tov the communities of the Diaspora leined the Yom Tov reading of ‘Asser Te’asser’ (Devarim, Parashas Re’eih, Ch. 14: 22), whereas in Eretz Yisrael communities read Parashas Shemini, the next parashah in the cycle, as Pesach has already ended.

This odd alignment, with Eretz Yisrael being a week ahead of the rest of the world, continues for over a month until, in this instance, the 27th of Iyar (May 12th), when in Chutz La’aretz, the reading of Behar and Bechukosai is combined; while, on that selfsame week, the communities of Eretz Yisrael read only Bechukosai, which will give the rest of the world a chance to catch up.[3]

This causes all sorts of halachic issues for travelers to and from Israel during this time period – which parashah should they be reading? If / how can they catch up? Although, technically-speaking, since Krias HaTorah is a Chovas Hatzibbur, a communal obligation, one is not actually mandated to ‘catch-up’, but is rather yotzai with whichever Kriah is publicly correctly being read.[4] Nevertheless, commonly, special minyanim are set up expressly for this purpose. In fact, several shuls in Eretz Yisrael such as the renowned Zichron Moshe ‘Minyan Factory’ offer a solution by hosting weekly “catch-up minyanim”, featuring the Torah reading of each previous week’s Israeli parashah, which is the Chutznik’s current one, until the calendars re-merge.

The explanation of this uncanny occurrence is as follows: It is well known that the Torah is divided into 54 parshiyos, ensuring there are enough parshiyos for every Shabbos of the yearly cycle, which begins and ends on Simchas Torah. Since most (non-leap) years require less than 54 parshiyos, we combine certain parshiyos. This means that two consecutive parshiyos are read on one Shabbos as if they are one long parashah, to make sure that we complete the Torah reading for the year on Simchas Torah.

As detailed by the Abudraham, there are seven potential occurrences when we read “double parshiyos”. These seven are:

Vayakheil / Pekudei, the last two parshiyos of Sefer Shemos.

Tazria / Metzora, in Sefer Vayikra.

Acharei Mos / Kedoshim, in Sefer Vayikra.

Behar / Bechukosai, in Sefer Vayikra.

Chukas / Balak, in Sefer Bamidbar.

Matos / Masei, the last two parshiyos of Sefer Bamidbar.

Netzavim / Vayeileich, towards the end of Sefer Devarim.[5]

However, there are several possible instances in which certain parshiyos are combined in Chutz La’aretz, yet are read on separate weeks in Eretz Yisrael. One such time is for the next month or so, as described above, making it one of the only times where Jews living in Eretz Yisrael end up reading a different parashah on Shabbos than the Jews living in Chutz La’aretz.

One common question is why the calendars don’t amalgamate much earlier. Why would two separate double parshiyos be passed over and only re-align on the third possibility?

The Maharit (Shu”t vol. 2: 4), quoting Rav Yissachar Ben-Sussan, one of the foremost experts on intercalation of the Jewish calendar and its minhagim, in his renowned sefer Tikkun Yissachar (written in 1538 / 5298; pg. 32a and 38b), explains that Chutz La’aretz waits to connect Behar / Bechukosai, instead of catching up right away, in order to emphasize that we are getting Bechukosai in just before Shavuos. Tosafos (Megillah 31b s.v. klalos and seconded by the Levush, Orach Chaim 428: 4) states that since Parashas Bechukosai contains tochacha (rebuke), there must be a “buffer week” [practically, Parashas Bamidbar] between its reading and Shavuos.[6]

This is because we pray that a year and its curses should end, in order to usher in a new year with its blessings.[7] This is apropos for Shavuos as it is Rosh Hashanah for Peiros Ha'Ilan, tree fruits (Gemara Rosh Hashanah 16a). Therefore, in Eretz Yisrael, if the parshiyos of Behar and Bechukosai were to be read together, it would not be noticeable that this is a buffer week. Consequently, they are read separately, so that Bamidbar becomes the official stand-alone "buffer week" before Shavuos, in order to emphasize that we are getting Bechukosai in just before Shavuos.

This might also help explain why the Eretz Yisrael custom is not to just split up Tazria and Metzora, letting Chutz La'aretz catch up right away. Since Eretz Yisrael is seemingly considered the ikar reading, it does not have to take Chutz La'aretz into account to slow down due to the independent luachs (or to be grammatically correct, 'luchos'), and only does so when it actually needs the buffer week.

Indeed, the Tikkun Yissachar relates that one year with a similar calenderical makeup to ours, the Sefardic Chachamim of Tzfas agreed to separate Tazria and Metzora, in order to be on par with the rest of the world. However, the response of the Rabbanim from the rest of Eretz Yisrael was not long in coming. They utterly rejected the idea, and demanded that they only catch up at Behar / Bechukosai, as that was already the established minhag for generations.[8]

Another theory posited by the Tikkun Yissachar is that we don't want to have Nega'im, an intrinsically negative topic showcased in Tazria and Metzora, spread over two Shabossos if we can contain it in only one.[9]

There were variant Minhagim in Eretz Yisrael over the centuries, and the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 428: 6) and later the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 10), in fact, cite both as being performed in Eretz Yisrael; though by the time the Chofetz Chaim wrote this, the universal minhag in Eretz Yisrael was to split Behar and Bechukosai, and keep Tazria and Metzora together. This is further confirmed by Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky's authoritative Luach Eretz Yisrael (5778; Minhagei Hashanah, Nissan), originally published in 1905, as only the prevailing minhag of splitting up Behar and Bechukosai is cited.

Another similar situation is when Shavuos falls out on a Friday in Chutz La'aretz, where it is a two-day Yom Tov. In that case the Torah reading would be that of the holiday (also 'Asser Te'asser'), whereas in Eretz Yisrael, where the holiday is only observed for one day, the reading on that Shabbos would be that of the next weekly portion, which would usually be Nasso.

When this happens, the people living in Eretz Yisrael stay one parashah ahead, meaning they are reading Beha'aloscha, while in the Diaspora Nasso is read. This remarkable dichotomy is kept up until the next potential "double parashah" which is Chukas / Balak. In Chutz La'aretz it is read as a double parashah, whereas in Eretz Yisrael only Balak is read.

What is lesser known is that this causes an even rarer phenomenon: the potential combination of Parashas Nasso and Beha'aloscha – creating the longest parashah by far, and potentially leading to the world record for the longest aliyah. This "extreme double parashah" is not for everyone, and actually can only be applicable to "Chutznikim" or two-day Yom Tov keepers who happen to be in Israel for Shavuos (most commonly yeshiva bochorim). Since they are only temporarily in Eretz Yisrael, they must (according to the majority halachic consensus) keep the second day of Shavuos in Israel as well, including reading only the special Yom Tov Torah reading. Therefore, although the vast majority of people in Israel read Parashas Nasso on this Shabbos, this group has yet to have done so, since it is still Yom Tov for them! To further complicate matters, throughout Israel, on the next Shabbos, only Beha'aloscha is read!

Therefore, to resolve this issue, some "Chutznikim" make a special minyan the next week with the "new double parashah" – Nasso and Beha'aloscha - containing a whopping 312 pesukim! (The closest is the longest regular double parashah – Mattos / Masei with 244 pesukim).[10] Others make a special reading on that day itself, Shabbos / Second Day Shavuos, at Minchah,[11] where the entire Parashas Nasso is read, plus the regular reading of the first portion of Beha'aloscha – making a world record aliyah of 180 pesukim, all for one lucky Kohen![12]

An interesting time of year, indeed.

Postscript: Although there are times and places that necessitate a double-double parashah, for example this year (2018), several yeshivos in Eretz Yisrael that cater to Chutznikim who only return from Pesach Bein Hazmanim for Eretz Yisrael's Parashas Acharai Mos - Kedoshim will have to read Tazria / Metzora / Acharei Mos and Kedoshim. Nonetheless, all four of these Parshos combined still have two pesukim less than the collective Parshiyos of Nasso andBeha'aloscha. Interestingly, there is precedent to a four-parashah leining as well, as Tosefes Maaseh Rav (34) relates that when the Vilna Gaon was released from jail, he read all four of the parshiyos he missed at one time.[13]

[1] As addressed at length in a previous article titled 'Rosh Hashanah: The Universal Two Day Yom Tov, and why Yom Kippur is Not'.

[2] Although the Jamed Chacham Tzvi (Shu"t 167), and later the Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim 496, 11; although he also cites that 'yesh cholkim'), ruled that even one merely visiting Eretz Yisrael over Yom Tov should keep only one day of Yom Tov like the natives (to paraphrase a common colloquialism: 'when in Israel do as the Israelis do'), nevertheless, the vast majority of halachic authorities, including the Shulchan Aruch himself (Shu"t Avkas Rochel 26), and even the Chacham Tzvi's own son, Rav Yaakov Emden (Shu"t Sheilas Ya'avetz vol. 1: 168), maintained that visitor status is dependent on whether or not their intention is to stay and live in Eretz Yisrael, known as 'im da'atam lachzor'. Other poskim who rule this way include the Pe'as Hashulchan (Hilchos Eretz Yisrael 2, 15: 21), the Chida (Shu"t Chaim Sha'al 55, and Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim 496: 7), Mahar"i Chagiz (Shu"t Halachos Ketanos vol. 1: 4), Shaarei Teshuva (496: end 5; he makes a sikum of the shitos), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 496: end 5), Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 13), Kaf HaChaim (ad loc. 38), and Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky (Ir Hakodesh V'Hamikdash vol. 3, Ch. 19: 8). See also Shu"t Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim vol. 3: 73 and 74). The majority of contemporary poskim rule this way as well.

See at length Rabbi Yerachmiel Fried's classic Yom Tov Sheini Kehilchaso (Ch. Keveeyus Sheim Ben E"Y U'Ben Chu"l: ppg.156 - 208).

[3] If you think this is a long time to be out of sync, wait until next year, 5779 / 2019, which although it shares a similar calenderical structure as this year, with Pesach falling out on the same days of the week, nevertheless, it is also a leap year, with two Adars. This is significant, as in a leap year most 'double parshiyos' are not doubled; rather they are read separately. Therefore, the rest of the world will not actually catch up to Eretz Yisrael until Mattos / Maasei, around Rosh Chodosh Av, almost 3 months later! Thanks are due to Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff for pointing out this fascinating fact. The last few times this occurred was in 1995 and twenty-one years later in 2016. The next time will be next year - 2019.

[4] See Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 2, Pesach Ch. 10: 22) and Yom Tov Sheini Kehilchaso (Ch. 9: 13 - 17) at length, quoting Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Elazar Menachem Mann Shach, and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv; this is in contrast to the ruling of the Rema (Orach Chaim 135: 2; citing the Ohr Zarua, vol. 2 Hilchos Shabbos 45) regarding if an entire tzibbur did not lein one week, that they would be required to make it up the next week along with the current parashah. See also Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky's authoritative Luach Eretz Yisrael (5775; Minhagei Hashanah, Nissan: footnote 6). However, regarding a mix of Bnei Eretz Yisrael and Bnei Chutz La'aretz traveling on a boat together, with no minyan of each, see Shu"t B'tzeil Hachochma (vol. 1: 7), Shu"t Ba'er Moshe (vol. 7: pg. 228), and Yom Tov Sheini Kehilchaso (Ch. 9: footnote 42 - citing Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv; and Miluim 14) regarding the different variables and scenarios and what to do in each case.

[5] Abudraham (Seder Haparshiyos). See also Biur HaGr"a (Orach Chaim 428: 4 s.v. l'olam) and Biur Halacha (ad loc. s.v. B'midbar Sinai).

[6] Additionally, according to the Abudraham (ad loc. pg. 372), and cited lemaaseh by the Levush (Orach Chaim 428: 4) and Elyah Rabbah (ad loc. 5), the reason why Parashas Tzav generally falls out on Shabbos Hagadol, the Shabbos immediately preceding Pesach, is that it mentions the halachos of Kashering Keilim (Vayikra Ch. 6: 21), albeit regarding the Korban Chata'as, as 'haga'alas keilim chometz lamud m'Korbanos'. Although in a leap year Parashas Metzora is usually read directly before Pesach, it is also in sync, as it mentions 'kli cherev yeshaveh', which is quite apropos for Pesach as well.

[7] 'Tichleh shana u'klaloseha, tachel shana u'birchoseha'. See Gemara Megillah (31b).

[8] Tikkun Yissachar (pg. 32b s.v. haghah). The exact quote of the sharply worded rejoinder of the Rabbanim is "Zehu Minhag Avoseinu U'Kadmoneinu B'Yadeinu Mei'Olam V'Shanim Kadmoniyos".

[9] Tikkun Yissachar (pg. 32a). This author has recently heard from R' Yossi Rabinowitz a fascinating potential solution, based on this Tikkun Yissachar, to explain why Eretz Yisrael does not simply split up Acharei Mos and Kedoshim the next week instead of waiting until Behar / Bechukosai. The Ramban, in his introduction to Sefer Vayikra (s.v. vehutzrach) writes that the laws of Tzaraas are dealt with in Sefer Vayikra to raise awareness of the issues pertaining to tuma'ah (ritual impurity). He then adds that 'venigrar achar zeh sheyazhir al ha'arayos' as they too are impure and 'goremes lesiluk HaShechinah uleGalos'. In other words, the Ramban is teaching that the issues of illicit relations immediately follow the laws of Tzaraas as they too are intrinsically highly negative topics. If so, since these issues of arayos are mentioned in both Parashas Acharei Mos and Kedoshim, perhaps utilizing the logic of the Tikkun Yissachar, this might explain why we do not split them up either, unless absolutely necessary. Another possible explanation is that according to most Ashkenazic authorities [see, for example Haghos Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Orach Chaim 428, on Magen Avraham 10), based on the Rema's ruling (ad loc. 8) that as opposed to any other 'double parashah' when the haftarah of the second parashah is read, on the other hand, when Acharei Mos and Kedoshim are combined, Acharei Mos's haftarah is leined instead], whenever possible we do not read Parashas Kedoshim's haftarah 'Hasishpot' as it references the 'To'avas Yerushalayim'. [This issue was discussed at length in an article titled 'The Case of the Missing Haftarah']. In fact, due to this issue, according to mainstream Ashkenazic practice, 'Hasishpot' is read only 14 times in the Tur's (Orach Chaim end 428) 247-year cycle, practically making it the rarest of all haftaros. There are even Kehillos that lein Acharei Mos's haftarah two weeks in a row just not to lein 'Hasishpot'. [See Shu"t Even Yisrael

(vol. 8: 38) and Halichos Even Yisrael (Moadim vol. 1, pg. 217: 24).] However, if we were to split up Acharei Mos and Kedoshim this year in Eretz Yisrael just to allow Chutz La'aretz to catch up, then 'Hashishpot' would be mandated to be read, which is an untenable situation that we attempt to prevent in any way halachically possible. Although it might seem odd to suggest that a haftarah reading should mandate a specific Torah reading, nonetheless, this might be an additional potential reason why we do not separate the two simply to get Chutz La'aretz back in sync.

[10] It is technically possible to have Mattos / Masei even longer - at 251 pesukim. This occurs when it falls out on Rosh Chodesh Av, as then there are seven added different pesukim for the Maftir of Rosh Chodesh.

[11] However, it must be noted that due to the 'bitul melachah' involved, as well as the fact that there never was a Takkanas Chazal to lein entire Parshiyos on a regular weekday, there is no inyan nor possible solution to attempt to catch up at a Monday or Thursday Torah reading; it must be done on a Shabbos. See Elyah Rabbah (Orach Chaim 135: end 2), Dagul Mervavah (ad loc. s.v. v'im), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 6), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 5).

[12] Although this was reading is practically the longest possible, Rabbi Dovid Heber of the Star-K, and author of Shaarei Zemanim, pointed out that the longest kriah could potentially be longer than 312 pesukim next year (Pesach on Shabbos in a leap year) in the following scenario. Some 'Chutzniks' go to Eretz Yisrael next year for Shavuos. On Erev Shavuos, in Chutz La'aretz they lein Bamidbar and in Eretz Yisrael they lein Nasso. Anyone who does this will miss Bamidbar, so they might make a special minyan for these visitors. The Kohen would lein all of Bamidbar and the Kohen aliyah of Nasso. The other six aliyos would be the rest of Nasso as usual. The grand total of Bamidbar (159 pesukim) plus Nasso (176 pesukim) equals a whopping 335 pesukim – a potential new record!

[13] This shittah is obviously not like the Maharam Mintz (Shu"t 85), who maintains that we never read more than two Parshiyos together, even if it will cause one to miss out hearing a parashah b'tzibbur. Although several poskim, including the Kenesses Hagedolah (Haghas al HaTur, Orach Chaim 135), the Olas Tamid (Orach Chaim 282: 4), Ateres Zekeinim (Orach Chaim 135 s.v. im bitlu) and Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. 4), rule this way, nevertheless, the halacha seems to follow the Haghas HaMinhagim (Shabbos, Shacharis 41), the Elyah Rabbah (Orach Chaim 135: 2; and Elyah Zuta ad loc. 2), Magen Giborim (Magen HaElef ad loc. 4), and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 6) who strongly argue that there is no reason not to allow a catching up of several parshiyos as long as it is done along with reading the correct parashah of that week. In fact, as mentioned previously, the ruling of the Rema (Orach Chaim 135: 2), citing the Ohr Zarua (vol. 2 Hilchos Shabbos

45) regarding if an entire tzibbur did not lein one week, is that they would be required to make it up the next week along with the current parashah. The Ohr Zarua explains that Takkanas Moshe Rabbeinu was that every parashah be read every year; implying that it is not necessarily dependant on the correct weeks, but rather that they be actually read over the course of the year. Interestingly, several poskim including the Magen Avraham (ad loc. 4), Machatzis Hashekel (ad loc. 4), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Eshel Avraham 4), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 7) simply cite both sides of this machlokes with no actual ruling, implying that this is issue is practically uncommon. Interestingly, the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 6 and Shaar Hatziyun 8) writes that the Biur HaGr"m (ad loc. s.v. im bitlu) implies like the Maharam Mintz, as he equates the "catching up" of Parshiyos with that of Tashlumin for missed Tefillos; where halachah only allows catching up for one missed Tefillah (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 108: 4). Yet, from the Tosefes Maaseh Rav we see that the Vilna Gaon personally did not follow the Maharam Mintz's rule, but rather that of the Haghas HaMinhagim. On the other hand, when someone pointed this Maaseh Rav out to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, after telling a questioner that he is not obligated to find a double-parasha-ed minyan as leining is a Chovas Hatzibbur, Rav Shlomo Zalman retorted rhetorically, 'Do you truly believe that you are on the Vilna Gaon's level to perform all of the Minhagei HaGr"m?!' (Halichos Shlomo, Moadim vol. 2, Pesach Ch. 10: 22, footnote 90).

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and l'zchus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad!

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