

# ALL ALONE

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshios Metzora & Pesach

### All Alone

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Today's Learning:

Avot 5:22-23

O.C. 122:3-123:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nazir 23

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Yevamot 51

In this week's parashah (and last week's), we read that a metzora must leave the camp or city for seven (or more) days and sit alone ("badad"). Chazal say that this is a punishment for the antisocial behavior of speaking lashon hara.

R' Yaakov Emden z"l (died 1776) points out the many benefits which man can attain only when he is part of society. Indeed, Chazal say, "Give me a friend or give me death," and the Torah says, "It is not good for man to be alone."

All alone, man could not obtain all of his physical needs, including proper food, drink, clothing, and shelter. A person also could not fulfill the Torah if he were alone. For example, he could not carry out the laws of property, the laws of marriage, and the laws of child-rearing.

A person who is all alone can never pray with a minyan or have his Torah questions resolved by scholars, and thus he can not properly practice a single one of the six pillars on which the world stands (as listed in Pirkei Avot): justice, truth, peace, Torah, prayer, and acts of kindness. Also, how can man emulate Hashem if he is all alone? For example, just as Hashem is merciful, man must be merciful to his fellow men.

Of course, there are times for being alone, but even in those times, man should not roam too far from home. To the contrary, man is capable of achieving the concentration that comes from solitude

while he is surrounded by people. (Migdal Oz: Perek Aliyat Habedidut)

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*"Zot tehiyeh torat ha'metzora / This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification."*  
(Vayikra 14:2)

R' Shimon Sofer z"l (1821-1883; rabbi of Krakow, Poland) asks: Why did not the Torah use a simpler phrase, "Zot torat ha'metzora / This is the law of the metzora . . ."?

He answers: If the Torah had stated, "This is the law of the metzora," it would have implied that there definitely would be a metzora in the future. The Torah did not wish to express such a pessimistic thought and therefore stated, "This shall be the law of the metzora" should the circumstance ever arise. (Michtav Sofer)

R' Menachem Azaryah z"l (1548-1620; Italian rabbi and kabbalist) uses this same idea to answer a question posed by the Tosafot (Rosh Hashanah 2a):

There are several mishnayot that begin with a number and then list a series of items - among them: "There are four new year's days" (Rosh Hashanah 1:1); "Four types of damages" (Bava Kamma 1:1); and "There are four guardians" (Shevuot 8:1). Why, ask the Tosafot, do some of these begin with "There are" and other simply state a number (as in the example from Bava Kamma above)?

R' Menachem Azaryah answers: When the mishnah refers to something pleasant, it says "There are." (He explains that "guardians" are something pleasant because of the allusion to the verse (Yishayah 62:6), "Upon your walls, Yerushalayim, I have posted guardians." Thus, in addition to the obvious legal meaning of the mishnah which teaches that there are four different categories of legal guardians, the mishnah also alludes to the four-letter Name of G-d which watches over Yerushalayim.) On the other hand, when the mishnah refers to something unpleasant, for example, damages, it does not say "there are." (Ma'amar Chikur Ha'din 1:3)

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*"The one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the kohen, saying, 'Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house'."* (Vayikra 14:35)

Rashi z"l comments: "Even if he is a learned man and knows for sure that it is a plague, he shall not decide the matter as a certainty saying, 'a plague has shown itself to me,' but rather, 'something like a plague has shown itself to me'."

R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (mashgiach ruchani of the Mir Yeshiva; died 1936) observes that it is bad manners to appear certain of something, rather than unsure, as the Gemara (Berachot 4a) teaches, "Develop a habit of saying, 'I don't know'." (Da'at Torah)

The Mishnah (Nega'im 2:5) states: "A person sees all nega'im--tzara'at wounds--except his own." Legally, this means that a person, even a kohen, may not judge whether he himself has tzara'at. Rather, he must go to another kohen. Figuratively, however, this statement is frequently interpreted as referring to the fact that people are rarely objective about their own faults. A person sees everyone else's faults, but not his own.

If so, asks R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; Hungarian rabbi and rosh yeshiva), how can a person assess where he stands? The answer is found in another Mishnah: "One does not search [for chametz] by the light of the sun and by the light of the moon, but only by the light of a candle." Kabbalists and mussar works teach that chametz represents the yetzer hara. The strong "light of the sun" represents wealth, and the weak "light of the moon" represents lack of success. Wealth is not an accurate indicator that a person has conquered his yetzer hara and therefore Hashem is happy with him, and lack of success is not an indicator of the opposite. Only the "light of a candle," an allusion to the verse, "Ki ner mitzvah" / "A mitzvah is a candle," is an accurate indicator.

What does this mean? If a person wants to know where he stands in his service of Hashem, he should look at his attitude towards mitzvot. If he or she considers mitzvot to be a burden, then he or she has a long way to go. However, if a person enjoys performing mitzvot, then that person is on the right track. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Chasdei David)

On a related note: R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (died 2005) writes that a critical milestone in a person's development is the moment when, for the first time, spiritual considerations compete on an equal footing with materialistic considerations as a person weighs the advantages and disadvantages of a particular course of action (whether or not the spiritual considerations prevail in that instance). (Ale Shur Vol. I, p.157)

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## Pesach

R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato z"l (1707-1746; prolific author recognized as one of the leading kabbalists of all time) writes in Mesilat Yesharim (ch.1) that everything in this world, whether good or bad, is a nisayon, usually translated, a "test." If so, many ask, why do we pray every morning, "Do not bring us to a condition of nisayon / being tested"?

R' Itamar Schwartz shlita (popular author and speaker in Yerushalayim) explains: The word "nisayon" comes from the word "nes." The common root of these words can have three meanings: to flee (as in Bereishit 14:10 and 39:12); to test (as in Bereishit 22:1); and to elevate (as in Bemidbar 21:8, where it refers to a stick held aloft). These three meanings, writes R' Schwartz, parallel three stages in a person's spiritual development.

Early in a person's development, he should flee from any nisayon. He should avoid situations in

which his spiritual mettle will be tested. It is at this stage that we pray, "Make us regular students of your Torah . . . and do not bring us to a condition of nisayon." True, even being a regular student of Torah is a nisayon for most people. However, our prayer means: Do not place before us other challenges that will disturb us from taking the first step in Your service, i.e., being regular students of Torah.

When a person has developed further, he is ready to be tested in a more dramatic fashion. We read in Mishlei (24:16), "A tzaddik will fall seven times and arises." In chassidic thought, this verse is interpreted, not that a tzaddik will arise even though he has fallen seven times, but rather that a tzaddik will arise because he has fallen seven times. At this stage, tests are integral to the person's development.

Finally, after one has completed the stage of being tested, he reaches the third level where he has been elevated.

R' Schwartz adds: These three phases parallel three stages of the Exodus and ensuing events. First, Bnei Yisrael fled from Egypt (see Shmot 14:5). Later, they were prepared to be tested by turning to face the pursuing Egyptians (see Shmot 14:5 - "Stand still and see G-d's salvation"). Finally, they were elevated by receiving the Torah. (B'lvavi Mishkan Evneh Vol. V, p. 173)

"They could not delay [leaving Egypt]." (From the Haggadah)

Our Sages say that, had Bnei Yisrael remained in Egypt a moment longer, they would have sunk to the 50th gate of impurity from which there is no return. R' Zalman Sorotzkin z"l (rabbi in Lithuania and Israel) observes that Bnei Yisrael reached that stage after only 210 years in exile. In contrast, the Jewish People apparently have not fallen that low after the nearly 2,000 years in the current exile. Why?

He answers: The key difference between us and our ancestors who were in Egypt is that we have the Torah and they did not. True, our Sages say that they preserved their unique style of dress and they spoke the Hebrew language at home, but that was not enough to preserve their identity. Only the Torah can accomplish that. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ha'shir Ve'hashevach p.105)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](https://torah.org/torah-portion/hamaayan) page.

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