

ALL TOGETHER

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Metzora

All Together

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Sponsored by Nathan and Rikki Lewin on the yahrzeit of her father, Rabbi Morris E. Gordon (Harav Eliyahu Moshe ben Yitzchak Dov a"h)

Howard Benn commemorating 50 years of being "mechuyav be'mitzvot"

This week's parashah continues the laws of tzara'at that were begun last week. But, while last week's parashah presented the laws of tzara'at that appears on one's body or clothing, our parashah discusses tzara'at that appears on one's house. We read (14:34-35), "When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I will place a tzara'at affliction upon a house in the land of your possession. 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'." Why does the individual say "Something like an affliction has appeared . . .," rather than, "An affliction has appeared . . ."? A person who suspects that there is tzara'at on his body or clothes does not say, "Something like an affliction has appeared"! R' Chaim Palagi z"l (1788-1868; rabbi of Izmir, Turkey) explains:

As the above verse indicates, the laws of tzara'at in a house apply only in Eretz Yisrael. When it comes to a blemish on a house in Eretz Yisrael (which is effectively part of the Land), it is not proper to speak definitively; the most one may say is, "Perhaps there is something wrong with this house." There is no similar concern when speaking about one's self or one's clothing. This, continues R' Palagi, provides a basis for the teaching of our Sages that the kohen should plead with the homeowner to repent in order not to cause impurity to Eretz Yisrael. Again, the kohen does not do this when faced with tzara'at on one's body or clothing. (Artzot Ha'chaim p.32)

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

The Gemara (Arachin 15b) reads this verse as if the word "metzora" (i.e., a person afflicted with tzara'at) were short for "motzi shem ra" / "one who disparages others." This teaches us that tzara'at is a punishment for the sin of lashon hara.

R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy"d (the "Reisher Rav"; rabbi of Rzeszow, Poland and member of the Polish Senate; killed in the Holocaust) observes that lashon hara is viewed by our Sages as one of the worst sins that a person can commit. Why is it viewed so strictly? Because, R' Lewin explains, it is an abuse of the unique gift that distinguishes mankind from all other living things, i.e., the power of speech.

The Gemara states that one who speaks lashon hara is like one who has "denied the essence" of our beliefs ("kafar ba'ikar). Why? Because, R' Lewin explains, he has dishonored G-d by denigrating His special gift to us, the power of speech.

R' Lewin continues: Even more than lashon hara is a terrible sin because of the attitude it demonstrates toward the human race (as explained above), it is even more sinful because of the attitude it demonstrates toward the Jewish People. Lashon hara causes hatred, and its consequences are discord and disunity, which topple the pillars that support our People. Shalom is an absolute prerequisite to the existence of Am Yisrael. Therefore, lashon hara is not merely a sin against the one spoken against; it is a sin against the Jewish People as a whole. This is so obvious, writes R' Lewin, that it is not necessary to address it at length.

The Talmud Yerushalmi relates that when Rabbi Akiva was imprisoned by the Romans, his student Rabbi Yochanan Ha'sandlar needed to ask Rabbi Akiva a halachic question. R' Yochanan therefore pretended to be a peddler and he stood outside the window of R' Akiva's cell calling out, "Who wishes to buy needles?" In the midst of his call, he interspersed the words of his query.

Rabbi Akiva used a similar tactic to answer the question, interspersing the words of the answer as he asked, "Do you have small ones?"

Why, asks R' Lewin, did R' Yochanan pretend to be selling needles, and why did Rabbi Akiva pretend to want small needles? R' Lewin explains that this was the period after the destruction of the Second Temple, which was destroyed because of the sin of sinat chinam / baseless hatred. Seeing the suffering of his teacher, R' Yochanan was calling out in anguish, "Who will sew-up the tears that have destroyed our nation?" Rabbi Akiva answered that as important as healing the tears in the nation is, that is not enough. Only if the "small ones"--the youth--are united in their faith and in their loyalty to the Torah can there be hope. (Ha'drash V'ha'iyun No. 124)

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

R' Shimon Sofer z"l (1821-1883; rabbi of Krakow, Poland) asks: Why did the Torah not use a simpler

phrase, "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 years' 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)

"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)

Pesach

"They became a nation" (Devarim 26:5)--This teaches that the Israelites were distinctive there." (The Pesach Haggadah)

R' Yosef Zvi Duschinsky z"l (1865-1948; chief rabbi of the Eidah Ha'chareidis of Yerushalayim)

explains this passage in light of the verse (Shmot 1:9), "[Pharaoh] said to his people, 'Behold! the am / nation, Bnei Yisrael, is rav / greater and stronger than we.'" Pharaoh expressed this concern at the beginning of Bnei Yisrael's stay in Egypt. Is it possible, asks R' Duschinsky, that at that time, before they began multiplying miraculously, Pharaoh could imagine that they would outnumber the Egyptians? Surely Bnei Yisrael were an extremely small minority in Egypt, which was one of the richest and most secure world powers of that period!

R' Duschinsky explains: What concerned Pharaoh was the unity of Bnei Yisrael, a trait not shared by the Egyptians. That is what Pharaoh meant when he exclaimed that "the am / nation, Bnei Yisrael, is rav." "Am" and "rav" are singular, alluding to the unity that Pharaoh saw among Bnei Yisrael. This is what we allude to also when we say in the Haggadah, "They became a nation [a unit]"--This teaches that the Israelites were distinctive there." They were united by their distinctive language, style of dress and feelings toward each other.

In addition, R' Duschinsky continues, this passage in the Haggadah alludes to the promise that Hashem made to Yaakov when he descended to Egypt. Hashem said to him (Bereishit 46:3), "Have no fear of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you as a goy gadol / great nation there." Yaakov was afraid that his descendants would assimilate in Egypt, so Hashem assured him that they would remain a goy gadol [again, a unit]--recognizable by the fact that they were united in their distinctiveness.

R' Duschinsky concludes: If it was important for the Jewish People to preserve their distinctiveness in a country where they were, in any case, the lowest rung of society, how much more so is it important when we have the ability to assimilate. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Maharitz p.74)

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** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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