

# CLASS 4 - PARSHAS TAZRIA - METZORA

*by Rabbi Heshy Grossman*

"A home struck by plague never was and will never be - Why is it written? To interpret and gain reward...."

"Said Rebbe Eliezer B'Reb Tzadok: There was a place within the boundaries of Azza that was referred to as 'the Metzora's ruins'."

"Said Rebbe Shimon, a man of Kfar Acco: Once, I traveled to the Galil, and saw a place that had been marked off, and they said: Stones struck by plague had been emptied there." (Sanhedrin 71a)

Our reading this week deals with several types of plagues, each known as 'Tzoraas', [Leprosy] striking the body of man, his clothing, or his home.

The Talmud cites varied opinions, debating whether or not Tzoraas ever did strike an actual home (a similar discussion ensues regarding both Ben Sorrer U'Morrer and Ir HaNidachas).

This is quite puzzling. The general principle in Talmudic argument is 'both these and those are word of the Living G-d.' But how is this to be understood when dealing with a factual occurrence? Either there was a Bayis HaMenuga or not, how can both opinions be correct?

Let us begin with a necessary introduction.

## **1**

The Hebrew term for world is 'Olam', which translates literally as 'concealment'. The existence of both this world and the next is defined by the shroud they provide, covering up the absolute truth.

It is for this reason that the apostate questions the existence of the world-to-come. The reality of its presence is hidden, beyond the grasp of mortal man. This exalted state is its 'Olam', a protective cover that shields true reality from human eyes.

Olam HaZeh likewise conceals the truth, reflecting the Divinity's outer layer, a disposable shell of the inner presence that sustains all life.

In a sense, both worlds are actually one, merely expressing (or hiding) in different ways the G-dly substance that is life's essence. While the world-to-come is perfect spirituality, removed from the materialistic matter that defines our world, Olam HaZeh is a physical facade, covering the eternal truth that is for the moment beyond our comprehension. In both cases, it is the internal unity of G-d

that defines existence.

Were we to live in a perfect world, every aspect of life would reflect the spirituality that is at its core. On that day, both G-d and His Name will be one. In the meantime, we are left with the task of removing the chaff from the grain, discarding the trivial pursuits that captivate the world, in our search for a lasting reality.

Though much of this is hidden, in one place G-d's presence remains intact, His Hand directing every occurrence. The continued sustenance of the B'nai Yisrael, and particularly, in the land of Israel, serves as testimony to the One G-d of creation. It is His plan for the universe that they actualize in this world. Hence, every Jew has a portion for the world-to-come, his life here mirroring the inner spirituality that is the essence of eternity.

## 2

"And when there is a mark of Tzoraas on clothing" - "This is not natural, nor a normal occurrence, so too, the plague of one's home, but when Israel is whole with G-d, the spirit of Hashem is constantly with them, establishing their bodies, homes, and clothing with good appearance. And when a sin occurs to one individual, a mark of disgust will appear on his flesh, or clothing, or home, demonstrating that Hashem has turned from him....." (Ramban, VaYikra, 13, 47)

The Ramban goes on to explain that the laws of Tzoraas apply only in the land of Israel, for the very same reason. G-d's presence is manifest only in the promised land, in the homes of His people. Non-Jewish homes or clothing struck with plague would not contract the stigma of impurity, for it is only the Jewish people who reflect Divine providence.

We are left with a conundrum. Because Israel is G-d's land, and the B'nai Yisrael His chosen people, they are prone to harsh punishment? Because they are 'whole with G-d', their homes and possessions are subject to destruction? Would we not expect the opposite, that the evil of the wicked be exposed rather than the minor foibles of those who are generally righteous and upstanding?

Think about this: Why do people respond with impatience to minor misdeeds of their own children, while ignoring similar mistakes committed by others?

Quick response to detail is sign of a close relationship. In their zeal to improve the character of their offspring, many parents cannot help but be aware of the implication of every deed. The obedient child, anxious for his parents' approval, is therefore keenly sensitive to their reactions.

Similarly, a Jew who takes Divine service seriously looks with perception at the ups and downs of daily life. He sees G-d's Hand at every turn, conscious of the depth of their relationship. Unlike animals, or unthinking clods, who could not be stirred to spirituality even were G-d to address them directly, the slightest allusion will drive the Torah Jew towards self-improvement. He lives in a dimension that is above nature, not one of natural cause and effect, and every incident reflects G-

dly love and concern.

This is why G-d brings a plague upon his wayward children. The striking of their homes and clothing serves as sharp reminder that their Father in Heaven has voiced His displeasure. The faithful son will strive to better his ways, repairing sin's damage.

For this very reason, no memory of these plagues can be sensed by modern man. In a grossly overindulged state of materialism, our senses are deadened to the subtle nuance of Divine inspiration. Punishment would lead to rebellion, not sincere soul- searching.

Hence, the one opinion in the Gemara that claims Tzoraas never was, and never will be. In today's world, no trace remains of the heightened level of spiritual awareness in which Divine response was omnipresent.

### 3

Much as this world expresses varied aspects of a hidden reality, the Torah as well reflects differing perspectives of the human condition. With this understanding, contradictory opinions are often reconciled, for each line of thinking reveals a particular approach to an existing situation.

There was a time in life when G-d's will was clear, when the slightest transgression brought immediate consequence. The Jewish people were the vehicle by which this perfection found expression, where the miraculous revelation of Divine intervention rendered moot any thoughts of an alternative order of natural cause and effect.

In the absence of such clarity, where evil runs amok and sin remains unchecked, the world itself takes a different form, concealing the Hand of G-d. This state of being as well finds expression in the Torah; the reality of all existence, defined in black and white.

"The Torah, how one should behave, is comparable to creation. Just as creation is their repair, similarly, the Torah is the repair of existence." (Gur Aryeh, VaYikra,12, 2)

As G-d is One, and His people are One, so too, the Torah and creation are one.

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