

THE SERVANTS OF G-D

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

On this past Shabbos, we read the parsha of the "Metzora," one who acquired the spiritual blemish called "Tzara'as" -- a spiritual ailment that looked like leprosy, but which could also strike a person's clothing or house. Our Sages said (in Medrash Tehillim and Yalkut Shimoni): "HaMetzora: HaMotzi Ra." The "Metzora" was "[he] who put forth evil." Tzara'as was a punishment for speaking Lashon Hara, for gossiping, for speaking evil about others.

Who was the first Metzora? None other than Moshe Rabbeinu, our Rabbi Moshe, who led us out of Egypt. G-d told him that he should go tell the Jews that G-d had spoken to him [Exodus 3:16]. How did Moshe answer? "They will not believe me, and will not listen to my voice!" [4:1]

G-d responded by turning Moshe's rod into a snake (which also relates to Lashon Hora), and then by afflicting Moshe with Tzara'as. "And G-d also said, 'please put your hand to your chest [into your garments].' He put his hand to his chest, and when he brought it out from his chest, behold, it was Tzara'as-covered like snow." [4:6]

Moshe was mistaken. The people would believe, and they did.

Last Shabbos was also "Shabbos HaGadol," "the Great Shabbos," the Shabbos before Pesach. On Shabbos HaGadol, we commemorate the extent of the people's belief -- and their tremendous declaration of belief and trust several days before the first Pesach. They were ordered to take the Pascal Lamb and bring it to their houses. This, despite the fact that the Egyptians worshipped sheep!

Imagine taking a statue of Buddha in Tibet, and tying it up to the corner of your house. The natives ask, why are you doing that? And you answer, because your Rabbi told you to have an idol-smashing party tomorrow. Imagine the reception you would get! Imagine the level of belief and trust necessary for people to listen to Moshe's instruction in this situation! It is not at all dissimilar to what our forefather Avraham did -- and for smashing idols, he was thrown into a furnace.

This same level of trust was echoed by the Jewish people every year on Pesach, and during the other festivals as well. The Torah tells us that every year, three times a year, the Jews should go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices on the festival. This means that every year, everyone able to travel would leave their property behind.

Israel was surrounded, then as now, by hostile nations. Then as now, these nations had spies. They knew the Jews were abandoning their property -- and they did nothing.

Every year, this same thing happened. Every year, our enemies had the opportunity to make a Yom Kippur War, to hit the Jews when they were down. Why didn't they do it? Because HaShem promised us in the Torah that they wouldn't. And the Jews believed HaShem's promise, and left the borders undefended in order to ascend to Jerusalem.

This is what Pesach is all about. G-d took us out to be His Nation. He believed in us, and we believed in Him -- and as it was then, so it is today. Pesach is about gathering as a family to remember, to relive, to experience the Exodus -- when G-d chose us to be His People, and we said that we would follow Him out.

Since then, no man has been able to dominate, to enslave, to exterminate the Jews, though many have tried. For we are no longer the servants of men, but the servants of G-d.

And as He redeemed us then, so may He redeem us again soon.

A wonderful, meaningful, fulfilling holiday to you and yours,

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Yaakov Menken