

THE FLOWERING OF REDEMPTION

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

This week's Parsha focuses our attention on the topic of purity and impurity. As described in the Torah, purity and impurity can be manifest on both the being of a person as well as on an object or place. Space itself cannot become impure; however, it can facilitate the transfer of impurity from an object to other objects or people. For space to act as an agent for the transfer of impurity depends on the proximity of the persons or objects to the source of impurity, or, by their being under a roofed enclosure together with the source of impurity.

Starting in Parshas Metzora, the Torah introduces the laws of Tzaraas. This apparent rash, infection, or fungus could manifest itself on skin, clothing, utensils, and buildings. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch explained that Tzaraas was not an ancient biblical disease. It was not leprosy. Had it been an infectious disease, the infected individual or objects would have been brought to the attention of the medical profession, not the priesthood. Had it been an infectious disease, the quarantine of person or objects would not have depended on the ruling of the Kohain, but rather the presence of the disease. (e.g. If the Kohain did not get a chance to see the "infected" person, the person could continue to be in contact with society. The possibility of the Tzaraas was not sufficient to warrant isolation.)

Had it been an infectious disease the Kohanim would have been especially vigilant and concerned during the holiday seasons when hundreds of thousands of Jews descended upon Yerushalayim. In fact, the opposite was true. During the holidays, even if there were indications of Tzaraas on a person, garment, or building, the Kohanim would not investigate and would not make any determinations until after the holidays! Furthermore, the very same rash, fungus, or infection appearing on a person or object outside the boundaries of Israel would be ignored or referred to a physician's attention.

Therefore, it is clear that Tzaraas was not an infectious disease. Rather, it was the physical manifestation of G-d's displeasure, intended to forewarn us against specific sins, such as Lashon Harah - slander.

The designation of the Kohain as the primary diagnostician, and the fact that Tzaraas could only be determined if it took place within the boundaries of Eretz Yisroel, is another example of how intricately Eretz Yisroel and the Jews are linked to each other. The verse states, "When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as possession, and I will place Tzaraas afflictionâ€¦" (14:34). The

verse clearly connects the people, the land, to the materialization of G-d's will.

In general, purity and impurity is in direct proportion to the manifestation of G-d's Shechina - presence. The greater the degree of G-d's apparent presence the greater the levels of purity and impurity will be. The greater the degree of G-d's apparent presence the greater must be the concern for maintaining purity and avoiding impurity.

Eretz Yisroel is the holiest country in the world, and G-d is more evident there than anywhere else. Therefore, the fact that we are in possession of Eretz Yisroel should compel us to pay closer attention to our relationship with G-d and Torah.

For generations, the Tefilah, "May we witness Your return to Zion" was but a dream. Today, we merit living at a time when Moshe's greatest wish can be purchased for the price of an airline ticket. Granted, the modern day Israel is a far cry from the ideal setting described in the Torah, yet it is the first time in over 2,000 years that our claim to nationality is supported by the actuality of our own land and government. Clearly, the creation and ongoing existence of the State of Israel reveals G-d's hand in a way that before 1948 could only be found in the chronicles of our prophets and the yearnings of poets and dreamers.

Certain Mitzvos can only be performed within the boundaries of Eretz Yisroel, and many of the Mitzvos associated with purity and impurity are only applicable if there is a Bais Hamikdash. Yet, our generation merits living at a time when the first part of the verse, "When you arrive in the land of Canaan" is a daily occurrence.

In the Tefilah for the safety and well being of Israel the description of the State as, "The first flowering of our redemption," is controversial. Some communities say it and others omit it. In no way does its omission negate the degree of love and concern that those communities have for Eretz Yisroel or the State of Israel. As Rabbi Norman Lamm has written, "personal beliefs do not have a place in the public liturgy."

Whether or not a person believes that the creation of the modern State of Israel is or isn't the beginning of the coming of Mashiach and our redemption is a matter of personal belief, not public policy. That is why there is good reason not to include what many see as a personal belief in a public prayer. Furthermore, how could any one group ever assume the right of establishing national statements of belief and philosophy when the great leaders and Poskim (arbitrators of Jewish Law) like my Grandfather Zt"l (Rabbi Moshe Feinstein) felt that it should not be included?

Excluding the reference does not lessen the importance of the State or the love and concern we have for her. Including the reference is a definitive statement that we know G-d's intentions. If we are being honest with ourselves as well as the history of our people, how can we ever be certain about the future? How many times in the past did the nation yearn for redemption and believe in the immediacy of Mashiach's arrival only to have their dreams shattered on the alters of anti-Semitism? However, many other communities include the reference to the beginnings of the Messianic

process, and we certainly hope that those hopes and yearnings will be realized.

As we begin the month of Nissan, the month of Pesach and redemption, we pray for the rebuilding of the Temple and a return to the laws of purity and impurity. That will truly prove to be the "flowering of our redemption."

Copyright © 2000 by Rabbi Aron Tendler and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.
