

METZORA

PROFOUND PURIFICATION PROCESS

Parashas Tazri'a and *parashas Metzora* are often read together on Shabbos as a double *parashah*. They both discuss the enigmatic subject of *tzara'as*. A person who spoke *lashon hara* was punished with *tzara'as*, a spiritual affliction that caused physical symptoms. *Parashas Tazri'a* describes the details regarding the contraction of the disease, and *Parashas Metzora* details the purification process of the afflicted individual (the *metzora*).

Tzara'as, as we explained in the chapter on *parashas Tazri'a*, was an affliction of the soul, not the body. Thus, its remedy, despite the use of physical objects, bears deep spiritual significance. The verse reads,¹⁹⁰ “And for the person being purified there shall be taken two live clean birds, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop.” The passage goes on to describe a seemingly mystical procedure. First, one bird is slaughtered. Then the second bird, together with the other items, is dipped into the blood of the slaughtered bird. Finally, the person with *tzara'as* is sprinkled with this blood and the live bird is set free.

Although we do not have the physical infection of *tzara'as* in our times, avoiding *lashon hara* is a continual struggle for us. If this procedure rectified the spiritual damage caused by *lashon hara*, then what might each of the ingredients symbolize? What secrets does

¹⁹⁰ *Vayikra* 14:4.

this purification process reveal? How can we cleanse ourselves from our epidemic of forbidden speech and prevent future outbreaks?

Straight to the Source – *Gasus Ru'ach and Ga'avah*

When reading about any ceremony described in the Torah, it is critical to remember the following concept: no detail is arbitrary! Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Bloch underscores¹⁹¹ how Hashem prescribed each detail for a specific and profound purpose. Our mission is to understand the spiritual significance of each ingredient and how each component makes an impression on an individual with *tzara'as*.

The cure for the *metzora* involves birds, animals that chatter constantly. Rashi proposes that birds are a reminder to the *metzora* that *lashon hara* caused his condition of *tzara'as* in the first place.¹⁹²

What do the *sheni tola'as* (crimson thread) and *eizov* (hyssop) represent? According to Rashi and many other commentators, these two objects symbolize *shafus* – lowliness.¹⁹³ *Sheni tola'as* is a woolen thread dyed with a pigment extracted from a kind of tiny worm. *Eizov* is vegetation, a small bush that grows very close to the ground. One is a lowly form of animal life, and the other is a lowly form of plant life. They both represent the quality of *anivus* (humility).

As Rabbi Chaim Friedlander elaborates,¹⁹⁴ the Torah's cure for *lashon hara* is to repair the root of the sin. The source of

¹⁹¹ Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Bloch, *Peninei Da'as*, 21.

¹⁹² Rashi's Commentary on *Vayikra* 14:4.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, *Sifsei Chaim, Middos Ve'Avodas Hashem*, Part 1, p. 127.

forbidden speech is the *middah* (character trait) of *gasus ru'ach* (lit. coarseness of spirit) – a feeling of superiority. This trait is similar to *ga'avah* (lit. pride – haughtiness). Both *middos* provoke the destructive quality of *tzarus ayin* – focusing only on the negative. A boastful and prideful person feels that he is greater than others, and is therefore entitled to criticize everyone and everything around him. Once a person looks at the world through a judgmental lens, it is nearly impossible for him to avoid expressing his criticism through slander. What does Hashem prescribe for a person who has fallen into this destructive pattern of *lashon hara*? A healthy dose of *anivus*, of humility.

Another quality of a *ba'al ga'avah* is a sense of entitlement.¹⁹⁵ Once a person feels that everything is coming to him, he will not accept anything less than the best. A *ba'al ga'avah* looks at others with jealousy and contempt and cannot avoid speaking negatively about them. Of course no one considers himself to be haughty. But if we tune into our inner dialogue, we might be shocked at what we hear. *Look at her showing off her new diamond earrings to the whole community! I'm just as good as her, if not better; I should have new jewelry for Yom Tov too!* This type of sentiment stems from *ga'avah*.

One of the maladies of our generation, according to Rabbi Friedlander, is that people are never satisfied with what they have. *Pirkei Avos* explains¹⁹⁶ that a truly joyful person is *same'ach bechelko* – happy with his portion. The source of today's *lashon hara* epidemic is our *ga'avah* and *gasus ru'ach*. These harmful *middos* cause us to look around and compare what we have with everyone else's possessions. Rabbi Friedlander explains that the *ei'zov* is model for humility because it is satisfied with very little; it grows between rocks, nourishing itself from just a clump of dirt. The lesson of the *ei'zov* to the *metzora* is to be content with little and realize that “just enough” is plenty.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Pirkei Avos* 4:1.

This same message of humility can be seen in other aspects of the purification process. The infected person has to sit alone; his loneliness fosters humility. Moreover, solitude is conducive to self-reflection. The afflicted individual is also required to call out, “*Tamei! Tamei!* (Impure! Impure!)” He must publicly reveal his wrongdoings, and the subsequent embarrassment deflates his arrogance. But why does he need to say the word *tamei* twice? Rabbi Friedlander clarifies¹⁹⁷ that the first time is a warning to others of the contagion, and the repetition is an appeal to them, asking them to pray for his recovery. Asking other people for their *tefillos* is a humbling experience; it shows recognition that one needs the help of others.

Let Go of My Ego

We have understood how *lashon hara* can be a result of arrogance. Let us explore this idea a little more deeply and analyze the cause of *ga'avah* in the first place. Rabbi Moshe Reiss notes¹⁹⁸ that *lashon hara* is a symptom of one of the following two problems: an inflated ego or low self-esteem. The first problem is obvious; as mentioned above, someone with an inflated ego looks at others disparagingly, as if to say, “*Who can compare to my greatness?*” However, attributing *lashon hara* to low self-esteem appears counterintuitive: *ga'avah* seems to be the direct opposite *middah* of having a negative image. Why would someone with low self-esteem speak *lashon hara*?

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk parallels¹⁹⁹ the three textual descriptions of *tzara'as*²⁰⁰ to three forms of arrogance caused by low self-esteem. The first is called *se'es*, which is related to the word for “lifting up.” Individuals who are critical of themselves

¹⁹⁷ *Sifsei Chaim, Middos Ve'Avodas Hashem*, Part 1, p. 128.

¹⁹⁸ Rabbi Moshe Reiss, *MeiRosh Tzurim, Vayikra*, p. 155.

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 156.

²⁰⁰ As listed in *Vayikra* 13:1.

feel downtrodden. They try to raise themselves up by putting other people down by speaking negatively about them.²⁰¹ The unhealthy habit of comparing oneself to others inevitably fuels this problem. *I might not be such a tzaddekes, but at least I volunteer at the shul – and she does not!*

Sapachas is the second term used for *tzara'as*, and means “to join.” Another motivation for speaking *lashon hora* is peer pressure. People with low self-esteem are desperate to be popular and join the crowd. They slander in an effort to separate others from the group, thereby confirming their own membership by default. *Look at that dress she is wearing! It's so ugly and out of style. She lacks the good taste to dress as fashionably as my friends and and I do.*

The third description of this affliction is *baberes*, which is similar to the word *behirus* (clarity). Human beings revel in knowing they are right – in having clarity. A person with low self-esteem thrives on any sense of validation he can get. *Lashon hara* often results from this sense of self-righteousness. When we do something great, we often think we can justifiably criticize and correct the ways of others. *I just ran this whole tzedakah campaign myself, singlehandedly. And she did not even donate anything when I asked her to!*

This analysis reveals an additional reason for isolating the *metzora*, a goal beyond creating an atmosphere of solitude to encourage introspection. Separating the *metzora* from the *kelal* (the public) prevents him from comparing himself to others. He is forced to look at his soul in the mirror and make an honest assessment. *Am I achieving my spiritual potential? How does my current self compare to my ideal self?* Sincere self-reflection is the beginning of acquiring humility.

The Cedar and True Humility

With our new appreciation for humility as a solution to the sin of *lashon hara*, let us re-examine the details of the purification process of the *metzora*. The verse reads,²⁰² “And for the person

²⁰¹ Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, *Let Us Make Man*, p. 47.

²⁰² *Vayikra* 14:4.

being purified there shall be taken two live clean birds, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop.” Thus far, we have analyzed all of the items involved in the procedure excluding one: the *erez* (cedar wood). A cedar is a tall tree that elicits imagery of strength, greatness and grandeur. The *Beis HaMikdash*, the most spiritually powerful place, was constructed from *arzei haLevanon* (the cedars of Lebanon).

Among the particulars of the formula, all of which facilitate lowliness and *anivus*, the cedar stands out as an odd exception. What role could the grand cedar possibly have in the remedy for *lashon hara*? The cedar represents greatness, a characteristic that could manifest itself negatively as haughtiness. Why then is it used to purify a person with that very problem? Rabbi Moshe Reiss articulates²⁰³ the question of many commentators: if the *metzora* is striving to cleanse himself, why does the Torah prescribe a symbol that reminds him of the negative *middah* that led to his downfall?

The first approach to answering this question is that the cedar, representing haughtiness, plays an important role in helping the *metzora* humble himself. Striving to fix destructive behavior patterns can be compared to hiking up a mountain. When making spiritual progress, it is important to occasionally look back. Why? It gives us a fuller perspective and reminds us from where we came. A *metzora* needs to be reminded of his past troubles with *ga'avah* and *lashon hara*. A remorseful person will use the reminder of the cedar to achieve even deeper levels of humility. He will think: *Look at how great I thought I was! Look at how much I criticized others! I was so low!*

Although it typically symbolizes man's image of his own *ga'avah*, there is a deeper way to view the cedar. The *refu'ab* (healing) of the *metzora* is not limited to repairing the damage his *ga'avah* has done to other people; humility is a quality that shapes not only interpersonal relationships, but also the relationship between man and G-d. Consider how our Sages guide a person who is fraught with doubts regarding G-d and is suffering from

203 *MeiRosh Tzurim*, p. 158.

weakness in his *emunah*. Interestingly, they do not advise struggling skeptics to address each individual doubt in an effort to conquer it;²⁰⁴ instead, they recommend that an individual strengthen his *emunah* by working on *anivus*.

How does humility relate to *emunah*? A passage from the *Gemara* reads,²⁰⁵ “The Holy One, Blessed is He, says ‘I and he cannot live together in the world’ as it is written,²⁰⁶ ‘the haughty of eye and the broad of heart – him I cannot abide.’ Read it not ‘him’ but ‘with him’ I cannot abide.” What do our Sages mean by this interpretation of the verse from *Tebillim*?

We described in the *Tazri’a* chapter that a haughty person is so full of himself that he has no room for G-d. Hashem warns²⁰⁷ about this consequence of *ga’avah*: “*veram levavecha veshachachta es Hashem Elokecha* (and your heart will grow haughty and you will forget Hashem your G-d).” A *ba’al ga’avah* credits himself for all his achievements and does not recognize *siyata diShmaya* (Divine help) in his life. But, as the saying goes, “It’s lonely at the top.” Haughtiness breeds loneliness and questions about the meaning of life. Once a person humbles himself, he no longer sees himself as the center of the universe, but as merely a tiny speck in the larger picture. He begins to recognize Divine Providence – G-d’s Hand in the world. His newfound humility strengthens his *emunah*.

Let us now return to the cedar, temporarily abandoning the assumption that it represents a person’s haughtiness. How else does the grand cedar contribute to the remedy for *ga’avah* and *lashon hara*? Here we propose that the cedar is not the symbol of a person’s self-perception of greatness, but rather the image of Hashem’s true greatness.

²⁰⁴ Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Lugasi, *BaYam Derech*, p. 129.

²⁰⁵ *Sotah* 5a.

²⁰⁶ *Tebillim* 101:5.

²⁰⁷ *Devarim* 8:14.

How does a realization of Hashem's greatness inspire humility? The *Sefas Emes* explains²⁰⁸ that true *anivus* is awareness of one's accomplishments being a gift from Heaven. A humble person does have a positive self image! He knows he has many talents and strengths, but he does not give himself any credit. He recognizes them all as blessings from Hashem. The grandeur of the cedar inspires him to feel grateful to G-d; therefore, the quality of the cedar is aligned with the two other ingredients, the *sheni tola'as* and *eizov*, both of which promote humility. By the way, this purpose is accomplished by us every day when we bow during *tefillah*.²⁰⁹ The physical action of acknowledging Hashem's greatness is an expression of *anivus*.

Rabbi Twerski underscores²¹⁰ that *anivus* and low self-esteem are actually polar opposites. A person with low self-esteem doubts his abilities to accomplish anything worthwhile. A humble person, on the other hand, responds to his spiritual underachievement by feeling a responsibility to work harder. The purification process as a whole, therefore, is meant to elevate the afflicted person and encourage him. Its message reminds the *metzora* of all he can accomplish, of the greatness he can achieve with Hashem's help.

The connection between humility and positive self-image leads us to the following, third approach: the cedar represents the potential spiritual greatness of a person. We cannot properly serve Hashem if we doubt our inherent value. A *metzora* needs to be reminded of the strength of the cedar as a symbol of his own awesome spiritual potential. The cedar is a symbol of *kavod* (honor). Honor can be either a positive or negative quality. As Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch elucidates,²¹¹ the cedar can represent three proper applications of *kavod*: the need to honor other people, the obligation to honor Hashem and the necessity of viewing oneself, too, as honorable. The *metzora* sees the grand

208 As quoted in *MeiRosh Tzurim*, p. 159.

209 Rabbi Shimshon Dovid Pincus, *Tiferes Shimshon*, p. 152.

210 *Let Us Make Man*, p. 17-18.

211 Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, *Ta'am VaDa'as*, p. 80.

cedar, utilizes the proper application of *kevod* and is encouraged, knowing that he is worthy of serving Hashem.

For Good Measure

Just as *kevod* may be applied appropriately, so too, *ga'avah* can be utilized positively. Rabbi Reiss notes²¹² how the elements for the *Parah Adumah* (The Red Heifer) are strikingly similar to those of the *metzora*. He quotes the Seforno, who notes that there is an appropriate use for *ga'avah* in a person's life. Every *middah* has its proper time and place, including *ga'avah*. The *Sefas Emes* relates²¹³ that the word "*middah*" also means "measurement." Comparing *middos* to garments, he explains that a suit that is too tight or short for a grown man will fit perfectly on a child. Different *middos* are needed in different ways at different times.

Orchos Tzaddikim compares²¹⁴ proper application of *middos* to the process of cooking: a gifted chef knows the art of adding ingredients with different tastes in varying amounts, depending on the dish. So too, diverse situations require the application of different inborn *middos*. Moreover, "*Hechacham yachol la'asos bara'os letovos* (the wise can transform the bad [*middos*] into good [*middos*])."

Hashem created every character trait, including *ga'avah*, with potential to be utilized for the good. *Orchos Tzaddikim* states²¹⁵ that it is praiseworthy to feel proud of one's G-d-given wisdom. Note the following verse: "*Ki im bezos yis'halel hamis'halel haskel veyado'a osi* (But let him who praises himself praise himself for this – being wise and knowing Me)." ²¹⁶

²¹² As quoted in *MeiRosh Tzurim*, p. 159.

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Orchos Tzaddikim*, introduction.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, *Sha'ar Haga'avah*.

²¹⁶ *Yirmiyahu* 9:23.

This type of pride, directed at spiritual matters, is beneficial. A positive manifestation of *ga'avah* is the strength of spirit that inspires a person to grow in *avodas Hashem*. Such fortitude is described in the following verse:²¹⁷ “*Vayigbah libo bedarcei Hashem* (and his heart was uplifted in the ways of Hashem).” In human terms, our egos should not be deflated (low self-esteem) nor inflated (meaning that a person is self-centered) – rather they should be elevated! The function of the cedar is to advise the *metzora* to channel his proud nature into being proud for the right reasons.

Conversely, even a lofty quality like *anivus* can be misused. The *Chiddushei HaRim* explains²¹⁸ that multiple symbols of lowliness might trigger the *metzora* to sink too low; he might deteriorate to a state in which humility is invalid. When is humility inappropriate? Suppose a person is in a situation that calls for action, a *mitzvah lichvod Shamayim* (lit. in honor of Heaven; for the sake of G-d). His quality of *anivus* comes along and tells him, *Who am I? What can I accomplish? I am nothing*. And so he does nothing. This is distorted humility because it prevents us from growing in *avodas Hashem*. According to the *Imrei Chemed*,²¹⁹ the symbolism of the grand cedar is intended to prevent this kind of distortion.

The *yetzer hara* is the force that creates this misrepresentation of *anivus*. It seeks to subordinate a person by abusing his quality of humility. Often, we are tricked into thinking that we are being humble, when we are really shirking our spiritual obligations. The *Pri Tzaddik* elaborates²²⁰ that *ga'avah* is a necessary tool in *avodas Hashem*; sometimes, it is protection against the *yetzer hara*'s efforts to discourage a person from spiritual growth. At other times, when a person is successful in progressing in *avodas Hashem*, he suddenly reaches a plateau and stalls, fearful that he will grow haughty about his spiritual achievements.²²¹ This is another ploy of the *yetzer hara*, against which the proper dose of *ga'avah* can provide defense.

²¹⁷ *Divrei Hayamim* II 17:6.

²¹⁸ As quoted by R Moshe Chayim Dandrovitz, *Imrei Chemed*, p. 190.

²¹⁹ *ibid*.

²²⁰ As quoted in *MeiRosh Tzurim*, p. 162.

²²¹ *Imrei Chemed*, p. 193.

This dynamic can be described with the following parable:²²² A cyclist approaches the border between two countries. Attached to his bicycle are two bags of sand. The border policeman stops him and asks, “What are you carrying out of the country?” The cyclist shows him the bags and says, “Just sand.” The policeman examines the bags of sand and then lets him pass. There are no laws against carrying sand across borders. The following week, the cyclist crosses the same border, in the same direction. Again, he is carrying two bags of sand on his bicycle. The baffled policeman examines the sand again, and then lets him cross. The cyclist appears a third time on the following week, again on a bicycle with two bags of sand. The border policeman, now suspicious, dumps out the bags of sand to see what he is smuggling and finds nothing. He gives the cyclist a stern look, but lets him continue on his way once again.

Years pass; one day, the now-retired policeman spots the cyclist on the street and approaches him. “Remember me from your border-crossings so many years ago? I must ask you, what was in the sand? What were you smuggling?” The cyclist just smiles and answers, “Sand? I did not care about the sand. I was smuggling bicycles.”

We aim for a balance between the proper use of both *ga'avah* and *anivus*. The *yetzer hara* exploits the opportunity to distract us from one *middah* or the other. The policeman was only paying attention to the sand, so the bicycles entered unnoticed. In the same way, when we are too focused on our humility, we might forget to apply *ga'avah* when necessary. The reverse is equally dangerous – being too prideful and forgetting to be humble.

This balance is discussed in a well-known concept brought by the *ba'alei mussar*. A person should carry a piece of paper in each of his pockets. One slip of paper should read, “The whole world was created for me.” The other should read, “I am dust and ashes.” The *metzora* needs a fresh start; he needs to restore the proper balance of his *middos*. The symbols of his purification process represent the equilibrium between *ga'avah* and humility.

²²² Rebbetzin Sarah Feldbrand, *Grow!* p. 147.

As we mentioned above, all *middos* can be channeled into positive uses. We learned how Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk parallels²²³ the textual descriptions of *tzara'as*²²⁴ to three forms of arrogance. The *Imrei Chemed*, on the other hand, elaborates how the concepts behind each of these three kinds of *tzara'as* can be transformed and elevated for *avodas Hashem*:

Se'es, which is related to “lifting up,” is an uplifted heart and the strength of spirit directed at lofty pursuits. *Sapachas*, meaning “to join,” refers to the efforts we make to surround ourselves with growth-oriented people. We are also strengthened when we connect to the power of the *tzaddik*. *Baberes*, similar to *behirus* (clarity), is the satisfaction we have in our spiritual accomplishments. This kind of pride is appropriate validation when it is balanced with the recognition that the goals were achieved with *sijata diShmaya*.

In Our Lives

Much like the *metzora*, achieving the balance between *ga'avah* and *anivus* is something with which we all struggle. But how can we acquire true humility? How can we have the right kind of *ga'avah*? Rebbetzin Sarah Feldbrand argues²²⁵ that a person cannot work on spiritual growth without knowing his weaknesses. She suggests that first we conduct honest research within our own selves. We need to understand the subconscious thoughts that are the catalyst for our actions. Ask yourself, *Why am I speaking negatively about that person? Is it because I do not feel confident in a particular area? Could I be stronger in my emunah?* Once you get to the root of the problem, you can begin to address it properly.

Another effective tactic in achieving a proper balance of *middos* is channeling our inborn strengths. Rebbetzin Feldbrand proposes²²⁶ that it is wasted labor to work against our natural tendencies. It can be likened to running on a treadmill. We end up

²²³ As quoted in *MeiRosh Tzurim*, p. 162.

²²⁴ As listed in *Vayikra* 13:1.

²²⁵ *Grow!*, p. 147.

²²⁶ *ibid*.

working hard and not getting anywhere, because we are running against the natural motion of the machine. Instead, we should exert effort to identify our inborn qualities and perfect them for *avodas Hashem*. Even our seemingly unhealthy *middos* can be reprogrammed for positive use.

Rabbi Friedlander suggests²²⁷ that true humility is achieved by working on reducing anger. Anger is a symptom of misplaced *ga'avah*; we get angry when we think we are right and have been wronged. He quotes the Ramban, who in his famous *Iggeres* instructed his son to speak softly to every person. If we habituate ourselves to always speak in low tones, we will be forced to deflate our anger and will begin to acquire true *anivus*.

***Siyata DiShmaya* – Beyond Boundaries**

Finding proper equilibrium between opposing *middos* takes superhuman effort; this is called *siyata diShmaya*. The verse reads,²²⁸ “*Zos tihyeh toras hametzora* (this shall be the law of the afflicted) *beyom tabaraso...* (on the day of his purification).” The words “*beyom tabaraso*” seem somewhat superfluous. Rabbi Zaidel Epstein explains²²⁹ that the words “on the day of his purification” emphasize the pure intentions of the *metzora*. The verse is highlighting an important day – the day that an individual consciously decides to do *teshuvah* and begins to act in a way that reflects his decision. At this turning point of repentance, Hashem actualizes the intentions of the *metzora* and purifies him. When an individual strengthens himself in an effort to repair his reprehensible ways, he merits *siyata diShmaya* – Divine assistance.

This principle applies to us as well. When we make a conscious decision to work on our *avodas Hashem*, we will find success in balancing our *middos*.

²²⁷ *Sifsei Chaim, Middos Avodas Hashem*, p. 133.

²²⁸ *Vayikra* 14:2.

²²⁹ Rabbi Zaidel Epstein, *He'aros*, p. 89.

Consider the following puzzling *midrash*:²³⁰ “Had Reuven known that it would be written that he saved Yosef, Reuven would have carried Yosef on his shoulders! Had Aharon known that it would be written that he greeted Moshe with a happy heart, Aharon would have brought musical instruments! Had Boaz known it would be written that he gave grain to Ruth, he would have brought her a feast!” What is this Midrash saying about these great *tzaddikim*? In what way are the Sages critiquing our *Avos* (patriarchs)? What is the message? Is it that if they had known their actions would be recorded in the Torah, they would have done things differently?

Rabbi Zaidel Epstein offers²³¹ the teaching of *Rabbeinu Yona*, which reads, “It is explained in the Torah that Hashem will help those who desire to repent, even if it is not in their nature to renew a pure spirit within them.” The *midrash* is not criticizing the actions of Reuven, Aharon, or Boaz, since they acted completely within the realm of their capabilities. The issue is that they did not think bigger. Our Sages’ point is that if they had strived to achieve beyond their natural abilities, Hashem would have granted them success. If they would have known their behavior would be written, that *siyata diShmaya* would have made extraordinary spiritual goals a reality, and they would have set their spiritual aspirations higher than what they thought was humanly possible.

The above message is deeply relevant to us. In our generation, when proper *anivus* and *ga’avah* are devalued by the wider society around us, we need *siyata diShmaya* in that realm more than ever. If we make a clear, directed decision to improve, Hashem will help us in extraordinary ways. If we recognize our challenges and act with pure intentions, we will witness G-d’s Hand supporting us along the way. May we merit to elevate all our G-d-given *middos*, to cleanse ourselves for *avodas Hashem*, and to have the opportunity to witness the future purification of the entire world with the coming of our redemption.

²³⁰ *Midrash Rabbah*, *Rus*, 5:4.

²³¹ *He’aros*, quoting *Sha’arei Teshuvah*.

²³² *Vayikra* 18:4-5.