

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Tazria-Metzora

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A King in Isolation in His Own Castle?

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Both of the Torah portions we read this Shabbat deal extensively with the phenomenon of *tzaraat* (not to be confused with leprosy or "Hansen's Disease"). However, while in the Torah we read about the struggle of an average citizen with *tzaraat*, later in Tanach we find another angle on this problem, which may shed some new light on the subject.

The story of King Uziah (a.k.a. Azariah), who was struck with *tzaraat*, appears in very short form in Melachim II (15:5) and is elaborated upon in Divrei HaYamim II (26: 16-21). We are told that his illness came as a punishment for excessive pride, manifested in his attempt to sacrifice as a kohen would. But our focus here is not on the cause, but the outcome. Uziah was replaced by his son Yotam, and Uziah himself sat, to the day of his death, in "Beit Hachofshit" literally translated as "the free house" or "the home of the free". What is this house, and in what sense was it free?

In the commentaries we find two main approaches, rooted in the words of Chazal:

- Rabbi David Altschuler (Metzudat David) explains that Uziah stopped serving as a king, thus becoming free from the heavy responsibilities that come with the title.
- Rashi cites the Talmud Yerushalmi that Uziah built a house inside a cemetery, which is called "the house of the free" because the dead are exempt from mitzvot.

Obviously, these two explanations are very different in the image they depict of Uziah's last days. One conveys a picture of almost light-hearted retirement, probably cushioned with all the luxuries a king can expect. The second, meanwhile, gives an eerie feeling of a living death, that he had lost everything that counted as life, apart from its most physical aspect.

The Talmud seems to be investigating this very same question when it asks if a king who is struck by *tzaraat* brings the korban of a king or a layperson. (Horiyot 9a) The doubt could be understood as depending upon the question of whether the king experiencing *tzaraat* is completely rejected, or only suspended from the executive role. [See Shaarei Yosef on Horayot ad loc.]

The Talmud concludes that the king can still enjoy his treasury, and consequently is still a king for the laws of korbanot. However, Rashi there notes that this conclusion stands in dispute with a later passage, stating that a king who is struck by *tzaraat* is rejected from monarchy and brings a layperson's korban. (ibid. 10a)

The question underlying this discussion may be understood as relating to the nature of monarchy – is it only a social phenomenon which describes one's relations to others, or is it a quality of the king even when he stands by himself? If it is the former, then when the king is cut off from his subjects and

from his administrative roles, he is not a king anymore; if it is the latter, then a king can exist in separation from his civil service, even as the only man on a planet.

One could further suggest that not all kings are equal in regard to this question – maybe there is a difference between a king who as a scion of David, entitled to the throne by Divine promise, and other kings, who were only appointed according to contemporary needs? [See Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 2:8.] A more daring move would be to analyze each individual king – did he lead the people out of his own faith and at his own discretion, or was he only a tail swung by the people in his attempt to acquire fame or power? Uziah could present an excellent case study for such an analysis, but that is beyond our scope.

The king, of course, is only an extreme example of a question that we could ask regarding any person who is separated and sent out of the city because of *tzaraat* [or quarantined for any other reason]: does he lose his own self, or is he able to free himself from his social framework?

[For more on this, see Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, Kovetz He'arot 37:10.]

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Summary

Chapter 20 opens with a discussion between best friends David and Yehonatan (Shaul's son). David is (rightfully) concerned that he will be killed by Shaul, but Yehonatan argues that since Shaul tells him everything, and he has not told him that he wishes David dead, he must not actually want that. David responds by suggesting that since Shaul is aware of Yehonatan's love for David, Shaul may have hidden this fact from him. (20:1-3)

David devises a plan to test Shaul's intentions towards him: David will hide in a field for two days ("until the third evening"), which will include two days of Rosh Chodesh, when David would normally join Shaul for meals. If Shaul were to ask about David's absence, Yehonatan should tell him that he had gone to Beit Lechem to bring a sacrifice. If Shaul would respond with anger, then Yehonatan would be able to tell David that Shaul wishes to kill him, but if he would respond calmly, with good wishes, then Yehonatan would know that all is good. (20:5-7)

After they renew their covenant with each other (20:12-17), they come up

with a hidden signal to transmit Yehonatan's findings to David: On the third day, David will wait (in hiding) near Even Ha'azel, and Yehonatan will shoot three arrows towards it. He will then send a boy to fetch the arrows. If he instructs the boy that the arrows are towards where Yehonatan was standing, David will know all is well, and that he may come out of hiding. However, if he instructs the boy that the arrows are beyond where he is looking, David should flee and not return. (20:19-23)

The plan works perfectly. On the second day of Rosh Chodesh, Shaul asks where David is. When Yehonatan responds, Shaul loses his temper and berates Yehonatan for being so close to David, and tells him that David must be killed. When Yehonatan questions this decision, Shaul throws a spear at him, and Yehonatan realizes that David is in danger, which upsets him greatly. (20:24-34)

Yehonatan then goes out to the field, fires the arrows as discussed, and tells the boy that the arrows are beyond him. After the boy gathers the arrows, Yehonatan sends him off to the city,

and Yehonatan and David reunite briefly. They bow, kiss, and cry on one another. Yehonatan wishes David well, and reaffirms his commitment to him for future generations. (20:35-42)

Insight

The Talmud (Megillah 31a) instructs us to read a significant portion of this chapter (20:18-42) as the haftarah for Shabbat when Rosh Chodesh falls on the following day. Why?

On a simple level, Erev Rosh Chodesh is referenced in the opening verse of the Haftarah. However, Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein (<https://www.etzion.org.il/en/machar-chodesh>) suggests that this reading emphasizes the importance of confronting the future, embodied by the new month. Shaul, despite realizing that his kingdom is coming to an end, tries to deny that reality and fight on. Conversely, Yehonatan, his son, realizes that the best way to prepare for the future is allying himself with the future king. May we take this lesson to heart as we enter new stages of life!

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Holy Land Halachah: Non-Jewish Cemeteries

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog
HaTorah v'haMedinah Volumes 9-10

May one bury a non-Jew in Israel?

Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog, the first Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, received this question from a community where a Seventh Day Adventist family had requested burial plots outside the Jewish cemetery. The Christian community would not bury them, and so they turned to the Jews. Rabbi Herzog identified three potential problems, but dismissed all of them.

Problem 1: Lo Techoneim

Devarim 7:2 prohibits giving members of the seven Canaanite tribes encampments in the land of Israel, and various commentators understand this to apply to other non-Jews as well. [See Tosafot Avodah Zarah 20a *d'amar*. We have also discussed this potential prohibition and its nuances in other issues of Toronto Torah; see, for example, 10:7 regarding selling Israeli land during the shemithah year, and 10:32 regarding selling or renting Israeli homes to non-Jews.]

Rabbi Herzog dismissed this concern on multiple grounds, such as the benefits to Israeli society in burial. These benefits include avoiding contamination of the atmosphere and avoiding spreading of *tumah*. Also, burying someone is not the same as "giving them an encampment".

Problem 2: Eliminating Tithes from a Portion of the Land of Israel

There is a rabbinic prohibition against eliminating the produce tithes from arable land in Israel. [See Gittin 47a-b.] Indeed, the land outside of this cemetery was normally

farmed.

Rabbi Herzog determined that this was not a concern either. First, the prohibition involved is itself rabbinic, and all of our produce tithes are currently rabbinic as well, so that this would be a rabbinic prohibition against uprooting tithes which are only rabbinic in the first place. Further, he contended that the prohibition may only apply where one causes land to be farmed without tithing, and not to graves, which will not be farmed at all.

Problem 3: Converting Fields to Other Uses

According to the Talmud, we are prohibited from converting fields to non-field use. (Mishnah Arachin 9:8) This would seem to prohibit burial in a field! However, Rabbi Herzog noted that some contend that this prohibition applies only to the cities dedicated for residence of the Levites. Also, enforcing this rabbinic prohibition could lead to enmity, as bodies remained unburied.

Beyond Rabbi Herzog's responses to the three problems outlined above, he also brought evidence that the Torah permits such a burial. Among his proofs, Rabbi Herzog cited a *braita* [text taught in Israel, contemporary to the Mishnah but excluded from its canon] which teaches that we are supposed to bury needy non-Jews even as we bury needy Jews. He argued that this text cannot refer to burying needy non-Jews in their own land; it must refer to burial in our land.

For all of these reasons, and more, Rabbi Herzog permitted providing the family with burial plots.

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Biography

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan

Rabbi Alex Hecht

Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen (nee Poupko) was born in 1838 in the town of Dzyatlava (present-day Belarus) to Rabbi Aryeh Zev and Dobrusha. When he was ten years old, his father passed away. Dobrusha married Rabbi Shimon Epstein, and Rabbi Yisrael Meir studied in Vilna under Rabbi Yaakov Barit. At the age of seventeen, he married Rabbi Epstein's daughter Fraida, and settled in Radin (present-day Belarus). At some point, Rabbi Yisrael Meir took the last name "Kagan".

Despite being an outstanding Torah scholar, Rabbi Yisrael Meir initially avoided the rabbinate; he reportedly did not even obtain *semichah* (rabbinic ordination) until late in life, when it was needed for legal purposes. Rabbi Yisrael Meir and Fraida opened a small grocery store, which she primarily operated while he learned Torah. Rabbi Yisrael Meir's scholarship and piety drew many students to learn with him in his home, which became the Yeshiva of Radin.

In 1873, he published his first book, *Sefer Chafetz Chaim*, anonymously. This groundbreaking work presented the laws of gossip and negative speech - which are dispersed throughout the Talmud - in an organized and systematic format. Its introduction notes that laxity regarding these severe and damaging prohibitions had become rampant, by both the learned and unlearned: The unlearned were simply unfamiliar with these laws, while the learned used flawed reasoning to justify their transgressions.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir later published *Mishnah Berurah*, a commentary on the Orach Chaim section of the Code of Jewish Law, which discusses the laws of daily living, including prayer, Shabbat, and holidays. In addition, he wrote dozens of shorter books and pamphlets on an array of topics in Jewish law and philosophy. One such work, *Tzipita L'Yeshuah*, discusses the fundamental belief in the Final Redemption, which he believed was imminent.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir's renown spread throughout the world, and he became one of the most important Jewish leaders of his time. He was involved in the founding of Agudath Israel. The "Chafetz Chaim," as he is known colloquially, passed away in 1933. He remains a symbol of piety and kindness, and his works are studied around the world.

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Torah and Translation

An Instantaneous Return to Israel

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, *Tzipita L'Yeshuah 2*

Translated by Rabbi Alex Hecht

כן הוא עניינינו אשר נפזרנו בקצה הארץ והקיבוץ גלויות יהיה מכל ישראל כאמור "ואתם תלוקטו לאחד אחד בני ישראל" ויחשוב האדם שהקיבוץ גופא ימשך כמה שנים עד שיקובצו.

אבל באמת לא כן הוא, הקב"ה עושה כל ההכנות מקודם עד שכשיבוא עת הקיבוץ לא ימשך הרבה וזה שכתוב "אם יתמהמה חכה לו" ושמה תאמר הלא ימשך הרבה הקיבוץ גופא ולזה אמר "כי בא יבא" ר"ל כאשר יבא הזמן שיוכל לבא לא יתאחר כלל והוא כמו שאמר הכתוב "מי אלה כעב תעופינה" ר"ל כמו הענף שהוא רץ במהרה מאוד כן יהיה הקיבוץ גלויות.

אבל חלילה וחלילה לנו להתייאש ע"י האיחור, ובפרט שהנביא הגיד לנו מראש על האיחור כי אף "אם יתמהמה חכה לו כי בא יבא וגו'" וחלילה לא יפול מדברי ד' דבר וכמו שאנו אומרים בברכות שקבעו לנו אחר ההפטר, "ודבר אחד מדבריך אחר לא ישוב ריקם"... והוא עיקר ויסוד אמונת ישראל...

ואשרי למי שאינו מתיאש מלחכות להגאולה ונותן לב על עצמו ובניו להרבות תורה ומצוות שלא תשיגנו בושה לעת ההיא כי רק בעוה"ז שדומה ללילה, הכל מכוסה ולא ניכר צדיק לפני רשע, אבל אז יתגלה הכל וכדאיתא בתרגום קהלת על הפסוק "סוף דבר הכל נשמע"... וכל אחד יתכבד לפי התורה והמצוות שיש בידו וכמשה"כ על עת ההיא "ושבתם וראיתם בין עובד אלקים לאשר לא עבדו"...

Similarly, with our subject [of the Final Redemption], in which we are dispersed to the ends of the earth; and the ingathering of the exiles will be from all of Israel, as is stated, "and you shall be gathered one by one, children of Israel." (Yeshayah 27:12, chabad.org tr. for all Tanach citations). One would think that the ingathering itself will continue for many years, until everyone has been gathered [in the Land of Israel].

In truth, this is not so: The Holy One, Blessed is He, performs all preparations beforehand, so that when the time of the ingathering arrives, it will not take long, as it is written, "though it tarry, wait for it..." (Chavakuk 2:3) Perhaps you will say, "Won't the ingathering itself continue for a long time?" Therefore, the verse says, "...for it shall surely come..." (ibid.), meaning to say that when the appropriate time comes, it will not delay whatsoever. And this is written, "Who are these who fly like a cloud..." (Yeshayah 60:8), meaning to say that just like a cloud, which races very quickly, so will the ingathering of the exiles occur...

But G-d forbid that we should despair from the delay! Specifically, the prophet [Chavakuk] told us from the beginning regarding the delay, that "though it tarry, wait for it, for it shall surely come..." (2:3). G-d forbid, none of the words of Hashem will be [unfulfilled]! As we say in the blessings following the reading of the Haftarah, "Not one of Your words is turned back to its origin unfulfilled." (Artscroll tr.)... And this is the foundation of Jewish belief...

Fortunate is he who does not despair of waiting for the redemption, and pays attention to himself and his children to increase Torah and mitzvot, lest they encounter humiliation at the time [of the Final Redemption]. It is only in This World, which resembles darkness, that everything is covered and the righteous are not recognizable before the wicked. But [at the time of the Final Redemption], everything will be revealed, as it says in the Aramaic translation of Kohelet, on the verse "The end of the matter, everything having been heard," (Kohelet 12:13)... [and] each person will be respected based on the Torah and mitzvot they possess, as it is written about that time, "And you shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him who serves G-d and him who has not served Him." (Malachi 3:18)

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Rabbi Alex Hecht, Zionism: Can the Secular Be Holy?

Ezer Dena, The Relationship Between Yom ha'Atzmaut and Pesach

8:00 to 9:00 PM EDT Sunday April 26

Halachah in Contemporary Israel

Rabbi Alex Hecht, Yom ha'Atzmaut: May We Establish New Holidays?

DAILY

Adult Seder Boker, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres

Gemara, Halachah, Tanach and Jewish Thought

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9:15 AM EDT Contemporary Halachah, with Netanel Klein

7:30 PM EDT Gemara Avodah Zarah, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men) (pwd: 18)

Monday April 27

7:30 PM EDT Exploring the Book of Ruth, with Ezer Dena

8:30 PM Gemara Shabbat, Chap. 13, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres

Tuesday April 28

1:30 PM EDT Yeshayah, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (pwd: 18)

7:30 PM Shoftim, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men) (pwd: 18)

Wednesday April 29

7:30 PM EDT Mishlei for university students, with Ezer Dena

7:30 PM EDT Ancient Texts, Modern Meanings, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman

8:00 PM EDT Stories from the Talmud, with Rabbi Alex Hecht

Thursday April 30

1:30 PM EDT Shemuel, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (women) (pwd: 18)

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Friday May 1

8:30 AM EDT Parshah for university students, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (pwd: 18)

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