



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Tazria-Metzora 5783

Grandeur: A Jewish Definition

Rabbi Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered on April 30, 1960)

This week our country and our city have been hosts to one of the most distinguished visitors ever to come to our shores. General Charles de Gaulle, Premier of France, is a man who has captured the imagination of the world, teaching men that it is possible to raise a modern nation from the throes of despair by holding before it the image of its ancient splendor. In particular, there is one word or quality associated with his name and character that is descriptive of his role in modern history. That word is: grandeur.

The word and the man come to mind on this Sabbath preceding the Yom Ha-Atzma'ut, Israel's Twelfth Anniversary of Independence. Is there a quality appropriate to Israel that is equivalent to the grandeur of France? Do we Jews have a grandeur of our own? What, in other words, is the specifically Jewish definition of grandeur?

I believe there are three Hebrew words that, together, can best spell out for us what Jewish grandeur is. Each represents another aspect of this elusive but very real quality. Combined, they represent the Jewish definition of grandeur.

The first word is: *tiferet*. We might loosely translate that as dignity. There can be no grandeur without a sense of dignity.

Of course, dignity has certain external manifestations, certain outer appearances that enhance it. But the dignity of *tiferet* is also expressed in an inner quality which, ultimately, proves far more important. We read in the second chapter of Avot: Rabbi said, what is the right way that a man ought to choose for himself? And he answers: whatever is *tiferet l'oseha* and *tiferet lo min ha-adam* – whatever gives dignity to him who does it and appears dignified to his fellow men. I prefer to interpret that somewhat differently. The right way a man ought to choose, the way of grandeur, certainly includes *tiferet l'oseha* – it gives an air of dignity, a dignified atmosphere, to

whoever acts in the proper manner. But of far more crucial significance is *tiferet lo min ha-adam* – that the dignity come from the inner self, that it issue *min ha-adam*, from one's true manliness. True *tiferet*, real dignity, is intimately associated with one's inwardness, with his uniqueness. True *tiferet* is achieved when man fulfills his ability to be himself. True grandeur comes when a man or a people realizes self-worthiness. *Tiferet*, the grandeur of dignity, must always issue *min ha-adam*, from the deepest resources of selfhood.

If we are to achieve the grandeur implied by *tiferet*, it means that we must not adopt the standards of others because they happen to be most popular. It means, rather, that we must live up to our own destiny. The grandeur of *tiferet* is not a matter of posture, but of perception; not demeanor but destiny. When a human being remembers that his real self, his true self, is *tzelem Elokim*, the image of God in which he was created – and he strives to live up to that image, then *tiferet lo min ha-adam*, then he has achieved grandeur.

So it is with the Jew and his collective historical and national character. Our true selfhood is defined by the heritage we received at Sinai, when we were commanded to be unto God a "holy nation and a kingdom of priests." When we strive in manly fashion to achieve that high purpose and live up to that great image, then we have achieved the dignity that is the first requirement of Jewish grandeur.

The second element in the Jewish definition of grandeur is *kavod* – which we might translate as "honor." From *tiferet* – the requirement to fulfill one's own destiny and realize his self value – follows the second point of grandeur which is honor or *kavod*. *Kavod* means that we must learn to earn the respect of others and deserve the honor they accord us.

How is that achieved? It is worth noting that the

word *kavod* is very close to kaved. “Honor” derives from “heavy.” True respect can only come from being weighty, from a concern with that which is truly significant and important. A person or a people of grandeur does not deal in trivialities. Grandeur is concerned only with the world issues that are truly heavyweight. Grandeur strives not to entertain but to impress. *Kavod* urges a man to strive not to be acceptable, but to be exceptional.

Put in another way, this means that the *kavod* type of grandeur will inspire us not to strive to be loved by others, but rather to be respected by others. The man of *kavod* caters not to the wants of his peers, but to their needs. This essentially is the difference between an immature and mature person. Everyone wants to be “wanted,” everyone desires to feel that he “belongs.” But with an immature person this is the totality of his ambition. The mature person transcends this. He achieves *kavod* – kaved; he achieves true honor and grandeur by concentrating on the heavier issues of life which sometimes can cause a man to be alienated from his fellow men.

This is something that we Jews have had to learn, and have learned – but most constantly relearn. We must understand that we cannot force our affections upon the non-Jewish world. We ought, better, earn their admiration. We Diaspora Jews do not always understand that. All too often we make the major goal of so many of our defense agencies the entry of Jews into country clubs where they are not wanted, or non-kosher hotels which are restricted. We dabble in trivialities, not in that which is kaved. It is a sign that we want to extract love forcibly. This is not the way of honor. We ought rather learn from the State of Israel. When Israel is not invited to an international conference because of the blackmail of the Arab countries, she never whimpers, she never begs obsequiously to be loved. Instead, with quiet dignity, with *kavod*-honor she works hard to earn the respect of her friends in the concert of nations. We too ought concentrate better upon building hospitals and advancing scholarship, upon increasing our philanthropy and espousing the cause of Torah. For in the way of *kavod*, there lies Jewish grandeur.

The third element in the Jewish definition of grandeur is a word, which literally translated, most closely resembles the French “grandeur.” That word is *gedulah* – greatness. What is *gedulah*? Is it wealth? Is it influence? Is it power?

Yes, it is that. But that is only part of the story. Grandeur is that and much more than that. And here, more than in the previous cases, we find the specifically

Jewish contribution to grandeur. Here we chance upon a genuinely Jewish definition of this great word. For our tradition has insisted that *gedulah* must always result in – gentleness, kindness, generosity.

Rabbi Yochanan said: *Be'khol makom she'ata motzei gedulato shel Ha-Kadosh barukh Hu, sham ata motzei anvetanuto*. Wherever you find mentioned the *gedulah* – the greatness or grandeur – of the Holy One, Blessed by He, there you also find mentioned His anvetanut, His gentleness. In all the Bible, the two qualities are associated. We read of God as “the Lord of Lords, the great powerful and awesome God” – and immediately thereafter we read of Him: “He executeth justice for the orphan and the widow, and loveth the stranger to give him bread and raiment.” We read of God as “dwelling in the high heavens, Holy is His Name” and shortly thereafter we read of Him that he “revives the spirit of the lowly, and revives the heart of the crushed and oppressed.” Of this great God of *gedulah*, we read that He is “the father of the orphans and the judge of the widows.” There can be no true grandeur, no true *gedulah*, without anvetanut.

When we remember that Jewish ethics is based upon *imitatio dei*, then we shall understand how grandeur is to be achieved by man. He who desires the secret of grandeur, must learn the secret of gentleness. He who wishes to scale the heights of *gedulah*, must bend down and gently minister to the lowly of spirit and the crushed in heart. Grandeur, in the Jewish scheme, must never be associated with arrogance or egotistical aloofness. Grandeur is not something that one can buy at the marketplace of public opinion. It is not a commodity that one purchases with acts of strategy. It is a divine quality that issues from numberless acts of gentleness, of kindness, of humaneness.

It is true that grandeur is not achieved by getting others to love you. But grandeur is achieved by getting yourself to love others. How interesting that in Judaism, a man of piety and scholarship, he who combines character and the wisdom of Torah, is called a *gadol* – a man of grandeur!

We may rightly be proud of the State of Israel in this respect. It has shown a deep understanding of the ancient Jewish definition of grandeur. In the help that Israel has been extending to the new nations of Asia and Africa, she has revealed her awareness that *gedulah* can be achieved only through *anvetanut*. Israel has reaffirmed for all of us the gentleness that is the foundation of true grandeur.

As we wish the State of Israel Mazal Tov upon its twelfth birthday, we pray to Almighty God to protect it and to

guide its leaders with His Divine love. We pray that Israel achieve the grandeur which is its destiny.

For so were we taught by Moses. *Rak am chakham ve'navon ha-goy ha-gadol ha-zeh* – only a people of wisdom and understanding can become a nation of grandeur. *Ki my goy gadol?* – How does a people achieve grandeur? *Asher lo Elokim kerovim elav* – when it expresses, through thought

Taking the Lead

Dr. Erica Brown

This double Torah reading of Tazria and Metzora is among the most challenging in the Torah. It is about a spiritual skin affliction that we erroneously call leprosy, its many variations, and the places it can reach: one's body, one's clothing, and even one's house. Instead of going to the ancient equivalent of a dermatologist, the person infected notifies the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest. If the illness is spiritual with a physical manifestation, then the doctor, too, must be a spiritual one. Who better than the High Priest to diagnose the rash?

When a person has on the skin of the body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of the body, it shall be reported to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests. The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of the body: if hair in the affected patch has turned white and the affection appears to be deeper than the skin of the body, it is a leprous affection; when the priest sees it, he shall pronounce the person impure. (Lev. 13:1-2)

The priest has the unenviable job of declaring the sufferer impure and has the more promising job of declaring that same person free of tzara'at when the inflammation disappears: "... the priest shall pronounce the person pure. It is a rash; after washing those clothes, that person shall be pure" (Lev. 13:6). Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra on 13:1 writes that, "This commandment was directly communicated to Aaron because all human maladies shall be determined according to his pronouncement. Aaron shall declare who is clean and who is unclean." The fate of this sick person weighed on the priest's shoulders.

On the same verse, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch observes that "naming Aaron next to Moses at the introduction to certain laws... is to indicate the quite special importance of these laws, not only for the theoretical understanding of these laws and the establishment of them for practical use in life... but also for

and action, its fealty to God who is close to it whenever they call upon Him. And once again: *U-mi, goy gadol, who is a goy-gadol* – a nation of grandeur? And the answer is a people *asher lo chukim u-mishpatim tzaddikim ke'khol ha-torah ha-zot* – which has laws and ordinances that are righteous, as is written in this Torah.

Read more at www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage.

the training and education of all the individual people..." What education might the community need from Aaron's inclusion in this supervisory role?

When it comes to this diagnosis, we might expect three people to weigh in on the problem because in most cases of Jewish law, a person presents his or her case before a *beit din*, a Jewish court of three. In two places in the Talmud, however, we learn that only one priest is necessary to determine this malady: "The verse states, 'And he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests' (Lev. 13:2). Learn from this that even one priest may view leprous marks" (BT Nidda 50a, BT Sanhedrin 34b). One priest alone is trusted in this role. Again, our question is why?

One answer may lie in a distinction Rabbi Jonathan Sacks makes in his book *Ceremony & Celebration* between the role of a prophet and that of a priest: "The prophet lives in the immediacy of the moment, not in the endlessly reiterated cycles of time... The priest represents order, structure, continuity, the precisely formulated ritual followed in strict, meticulous obedience." Assigning the priest the task of identifying *tzara'at*, leprous boils, and then declaring the disease over is a way to reinstate order into a situation of chaos because everything that surrounds the sufferer is at risk of infection. Rabbi Sacks continues his description of the priest's foundational orientation: "For the priest, the key words of the religious life are *kadosh*, holy, and *tahor*, pure. To be a Jew is to be set apart: That is what the word *kadosh*, holy, actually means. This in turn has to do with the special closeness the Jewish people have to God..." We can extrapolate from here that because the priest is exquisitely sensitive to purity and can make fine distinctions between what is pure and impure, it only takes one priest to make the designation.

Another approach is to think of the priest in this role

as a leader doing a job that others may shun for fear of infection. The declaration was likely humiliating to the individual afflicted, alienating him from society and from those he loves. This fear of disease may have also led others to marginalize the leper and refuse to usher him back into the community at the earliest possible time. We can trust that one priest, sanctified and prepared to face the challenge, would do his very best to ensure fair and efficient treatment because he represents God. Of all people, it is the priest who should see the divine in others and remove any barrier to achieving godliness.

The priest, by modeling these difficult activities, also helped others reintegrate the sufferer. After all, if the holiest person in the community declares a person afflicted safe to return to normal life, then that declaration must be good enough for everyone. The leader sets the standard of care and concern for others. Dr. Tracy Brower claims that, “One of the most significant responsibilities as a leader is to model the way” (“How To Lead Through Hard Times: The 5 Most Important Things To Know,” *Forbes* Aug. 16, 2020). When it comes to managing others, she writes, “People pay attention to you as a manager—perhaps more than you realize—including what you say, how you react and the decisions you make.”

She also adds that when leading through hard times, the leader must stay “connected to key information. As leaders rise in the hierarchy, they run the risk of being increasingly insulated from key information because people are taught to bring them solutions, not problems.

Taking Control

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

The process of declaring a person a metzora, someone who is afflicted with tzora'as, or leprosy, as defined by some, is described in this week's parsha. The person who suspects that a spot on his body constitutes tzora'as is brought to the kohein, who views the spot, makes a determination and declares the person pure or impure. Actually, the halacha is that anyone who knows the laws of tzora'as can make that determination, and then tell it to the Kohen, who is the only one who can make the declaration. Why is the declaration the exclusive province of the kohein? After all, the kohein arguably has the most honored status in Jewish life. Why should he be the one to declare a person afflicted with the highest possible degree

of impurity? To be resilient, you must be informed, so do all you can to ask for difficult details as much as you seek solutions.” The priest's knowledge of every boil and scale and his intimate involvement with all stations of society in this diagnosis kept him connected to key information and close to those he ultimately served.

Brower makes another striking point. “Sometimes leaders may avoid asking too many questions because they fear being invasive.” She states that in one study about the mental health and wellness of employees, “... employees felt better when leaders checked in and demonstrated they cared. Take cues from people about whether they want to talk through issues, and back off if they don't. But be clear about the fact that you are paying attention.” The priest in this week's Torah reading asked lots of questions. He had to pay attention, and attention is something that followers crave from leaders. The questions he asked the person afflicted were a way of intently focusing on the problem and potential solutions in the life of one person from someone who cared profoundly.

Brower offers another role that leaders play in hard times. They provide psychological safety: “a feeling that employees are secure, can take appropriate risks and bring their best to their work.” Knowing that the High Priest had this body of information and would use it to ameliorate the lives of any Israelite provided psychological safety to the community.

So, as a leader, describe how you provide psychological safety and acute concern to those you lead.

of impurity?

One answer that we have suggested in the past is that the kohein, in dealing with this area of halacha, is thereby demonstrating that, in the service of God, no activity is beneath his dignity, but, on the contrary, is a badge of honor. This idea was, according to the Talmud in Berachos (4a), expressed by King David, when he said that his hands were soiled with the blood of women's flow brought to him to determine their halachik status. This idea was offered by Rav Dovid Feinstein to explain why the korbon pesach was the initiating service given to the Jewish people upon their redemption from Egypt.

Rav Yaakov Ruderman, as cited by Rabbi Yissochur

Frand, noted that the declaration of the status of the person with the spot, is made by the kohein through the pronouncement of a single word, either pure, or impure. Although tzora'as comes, according to the Talmud, for a variety of reasons, the most prominent of them is the sin of lashon hora or evil speech. The message to the metzora, then, is the importance of every single word that a person speaks. We may add that this message is delivered by the kohein, who used the power of speech to bring peace and reconciliation among people, while the metzora used it to plant discord among them.

Perhaps, we can suggest another reason for the kohein's role in declaring a person a metzora. Rav Henoch Leibowitz, in his *Chidushei HaLeiv*, says, based on a midrash, that the reason that a metzora is afflicted with a condition that emerges from his body rather than suffering, for example, a loss of money, or property, is that losing control of one's own body is particularly troublesome to a person. Such a punishment, it seems, is commensurate with the sin of leshon hora and the suffering it can

generate. Although Rav Henoch does not say this, we may add that this loss of control of one's own body had behind it the comment of the rabbis that a metzora is considered as being dead. The loss of a loved one, too, particularly of one's own child, is also, in a sense, akin to the loss of part of one's own self. When Aharon lost his two sons, Nadav and Avihu, he reacted with silence, although, as the midrash tells us, he could have articulated some form of complaint. Aharon, however, said nothing, realizing that he needed, under his new circumstances, to reassess his life and adjust it in dealing with what occurred. This reaction was to serve as a model for the metzora, who, through his condition, loses control of himself, and needs to engage in a process of reinvention. This process begins with silence and a development of an understanding of how to use the gift of speech in a positive way. Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, used to say that the plain meaning of the terms *shemiras halashon* is guarding oneself from speaking, which is sometimes necessary. The kohein, then, is the proper person for the metzora in this process.

Think Twice

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur given in the Gruss Kollel on March 31, 2022)

This week's Parsha discusses tzara'as, and in the third pasuk of this discussion the Torah says *Ve-ra'ah ha-kohen es ha-nega be-or ha-basar ve-se'ar ba-nega hafach lavan u-mar'eh ha-nega amok me-or besaro, nega tzara'as hu ve-ra'ahu ha-kohen ve-timei oso*. There is an obvious pshat question on the pasuk. First it says *ve-ra'ah ha-kohen*, etc., and then again, *ve-ra'ahu ha-kohen ve-timei oso*. What reason did the Torah have to say that Kohen needs to see it twice if he only examined it once?

The Meschech Chachma explains this repetition based on the Mishnah (Nega'im 3:2): *Yeish yom she'ata ro'eh ve-yeish yom she-ein ata ro'eh*. When the Kohen judges tzara'as there is a certain leeway because the psak and its consequences are entirely at his discretion. And the circumstances play a crucial role in what and when the Kohen paskens. Sometimes it's a chasan during his *sheva yemei ha-mishte*, or it's a regel, etc. and then the Kohen will not declare him tamei, even though the physical manifestations of tzara'as are there. Sometimes it's just not the right time. This leeway is given to the Kohen *al pi gzeiras ha-kasuv*.

Therefore, the Meschech Chachma suggests that the first instance of *ve-ra'ah ha-kohen* refers to the Kohen examining the physical manifestations of the nega in the skin, the hair, etc. He looks at the physical evidence to learn the facts. While the second instance of *ve-ra'ahu ha-kohen* is when considers the broader circumstances of the case before issuing a psak. And even if the facts show that there is tzara'as, he deliberates whether to give the psak of tzara'as, or to refrain because of the personal circumstances of the case.

And it has been suggested that we can learn a broader life lesson and a general Mussar from this discussion of tzara'as. While we may not be Kohanim and we may not practice *tumas tzara'as be-zman ha-zeh*, we still judge people and decide what to say to them. Like the Kohen, we judge whether to tell a person that he is tamei, etc. And based on this Meschech Chachma we see that when you judge people you need to look twice before you leap. First look at the facts. We often jump to conclusions. We should examine the facts and re-examine them to make sure we have everything right. And we should also

consider the circumstances of the situation, as even if the facts indicate that something is wrong, it may not be the right time to say it, or we may not be the right person to say it. Therefore, before you judge others and go around saying what and who is tamei, make sure to do *ve-ra'ah, ve-ra'ahu*. Double-check the facts. Make sure that you are not jumping to conclusions. Make sure that you are not

Hating Sins, Not Sinners

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The parsha discusses the skin disease called *tzara'as*, a divinely inflicted ailment that comes from sins. *Tzara'as* is commonly—and mistakenly—translated as leprosy. The psukim say that houses and clothing can contract *tzara'as*, so it is clearly different from leprosy. This unique ailment disappeared with the destruction of the First Temple.

The Gemara (Arachin 16a) states that *tzara'as* can come as a result of several types of sins. Primarily, though, it comes on account of *motzi sheim ra*, the sin of spreading negative stories about someone. The word *metzora* is similar to the words *motzi ra*.

This week's parsha discusses the *taharas hametzora* and his reentry into society. In Parshas Tazria, the Torah says that one consequence of being afflicted with *tzara'as* is that the person must stay outside of the camp, he cannot enter a walled city, and he must call out to people who come near him, "*Tamei tamei, I am impure,*" stay away from me (Vayikra 13:45).

As part of his rehabilitation, the *metzora* must go through a purification process. He must bring three sacrifices: *olah, chatas, and asham*. The *olah* is fully burnt on the *mizbei'ach*. The *chatas* comes as an atonement offering, which is partially eaten by kohanim and partially burnt. The *asham* has some of the *chatas* procedure in how it is eaten—for example, only kohanim partake of it—but it is like an *olah* in the way the blood is thrown on the *mizbei'ach*.

Why does the *metzora* have to bring these three sacrifices?

As mentioned above, we understand from many sources that the ailment of *tzara'as* comes as a result of *lashon hara*, evil speech. For example, later in the Torah, Miriam spoke badly about Moshe Rabbeinu and, in response to her speech, was afflicted with *tzara'as*.

biased. And *ke-shem she-mitzva al ha-adam lomar davar ha-nishma, kach mitzvah al adam she-lo lomar davar she-eino nishama*. Even if something is true, we should consider whether it is necessary or appropriate to say it. We have to think whether our comment will be effective or backfire, whether it will be constructive or hurtful, and only then—after both checks—should we communicate our judgment.

Baseless Hatred

Lashon hara, speaking badly about other Jews, is basically an expression of unjustified hatred. It is not clear that hatred is ever justified. The Tanya writes that occasionally, the Torah does make reference to a *sonai*, a hated enemy. For example, when you see "*chamor sona'acha roveitz tachas masao*. the donkey of your enemy struggling under its burden" (Shemos 23:5), you should go help him. The Gemara (Pesachim 113b) asks: How is it possible for a Jew to have an enemy? The Gemara answers that it is permitted to hate a great sinner. But the Tanya questions this based on a contradicting verse. "*Lo sisna es achicha bilvavecha*. Do not hate your brother in your heart" (Vayikra 19:17). This pasuk does not make any exceptions for sinners.

The Tanya explains that you can hate sinning, but you can't hate the person who commits the sin. Bruria, the wife of Rabbi Meir, told him the same thing (see Brachos 10a). Apparently, there was a group of ruffians who bothered Rabbi Meir very much. Rabbi Meir was going to pray that they die, but his wife objected based on the verse, "*Yitamu chata'im min ha'aretz*. Sins should disappear from the land" (Tehillim 104:35)—sins should disappear, not sinners.

The Tanya teaches that, sometimes, getting angry at the inappropriate actions of fellow Jews may be warranted. However, it is important to maintain awareness that the sins themselves are external actions of a person. The person who committed the sins, however, should not be the object of hatred. We are supposed to love every Jew and pray for every Jew to repent. All of us would hope that nobody would ever hate us. If I did something evil (God forbid) to someone else, I would want him to understand that I am weak and that I made a bad decision. I would want him to have sympathy for me. We must resent the sin itself, for it is detestable. But we shouldn't resent or hate the sinful person himself.

Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

Lashon hara comes as a result of hatred of another person. The Gemara (Yoma 9a) says that the Second Temple was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*, unjustified hatred.

To illustrate the hatred of the time, the Gemara (Gittin 55b-56a) tells us the fascinating story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. These two Jews with similar names lived in the city of Yerushalayim. Kamtza was well-liked by the people of the community while Bar Kamtza was not. They had good reason not to like him. He was an informer and spy for the Romans, who were oppressing Jews at the time. The Romans had outlawed Shabbos, milah, and tefillin. They disrupted the temple service, and Jews had to do mitzvos in secret. Bar Kamtza would tell the Roman authorities when Jews were doing mitzvos, and some were killed by his word.

A member of the Yerushalayim community made a party and sent an invitation to be hand-delivered to Kamtza. The messenger mistakenly delivered the note to Bar Kamtza instead. Upon receiving the invitation, Bar Kamtza was surprised, but, since he received an invitation, he decided to go to the party. When he arrived, the host saw him and was furious. He said, "It is a disgrace to have this informer here. Get out!" Until that point, Bar Kamtza had been in a good mood. He pleaded, "Don't embarrass me by throwing me out. I'll pay for half of the expenses of this party." The host again demanded that he leave. Bar Kamtza, with one last desperate plea for consideration, said, "I'll cover the entire expense of this party." But the host demanded publicly that he leave and had him thrown out.

Ejected and dejected, Bar Kamtza thought about all the rabbis who had witnessed this humiliating exchange. "They did not stop the host from embarrassing me," he thought. Bar Kamtza then decided to extract revenge upon the whole Jewish community, since their leaders were complicit in his humiliation. He went to the emperor of Rome and said, "The Jews are rebelling against you. Try sending a sacrifice to them to be brought in their temple, and you will see that they will not accept it. This is because they despise you and are rebelling against your authority." The emperor did send the sacrifice. On the way to the Beis Hamikdash, Bar Kamtza nicked the lip of the animal to disqualify it as a sacrifice. In the temple, the rabbis made the fatal decision not to allow the sacrifice. They could have allowed it under the circumstances, but were afraid to break the regular rule. Bar Kamtza went back with witnesses to the emperor, who was furious and sent his

army to Yerushalayim and destroyed it.

I will share with you my understanding of this story.

The Gemara says that all of this happened because of baseless hatred, *sinas chinam*. But this hatred was not baseless! Bar Kamtza was indeed a traitor to the Jews! Even before this story, he had Jewish blood on his hands. Jews had been killed because of him. Why do the rabbis call this *sinas chinam*?

The answer is that we are supposed to hate the sins of the scoundrel, not him. There was apparently a spark of teshuva that Bar Kamtza felt when he received his invitation to this prestigious occasion. He thought, "Maybe I should change my ways and stop being an informer." Enmity begets enmity, but friendship also begets friendship. In his mind, when he received the invitation, he felt friendship. He thought, "Maybe I will change in response."

Sadly, his invitation was only a mistake. He was ignominiously ejected and thrown out. This was unjustified hatred. The hatred of the host and of the onlookers in this case went beyond hatred for Bar Kamtza's horrible deeds. They hated him personally. Had they not, they would have been open to his rehabilitation and desire to become an integrated member of the community again.

Lashon hara results from *sinas chinam*; such speech is the result of this disease of hating a Jew. But there are two kinds of evil speech: *lashon hara* and *motzi sheim ra*. The difference is that *motzi sheim ra* is false, while *lashon hara* is true. Even though the bad words are true, they are still not justified. It is only justified if you're trying to correct behavior, like the principal of a school talking to a teacher about a student. They desire to correct the child's behavior. Such a discussion has nothing to do with hatred.

But if someone does hate another and speaks negatively about him, even if it is true, it is prohibited *lashon hara*. If it is false, it is called *motzi sheim ra*, an even greater misdeed.

Sinas chinam Is Equivalent to the Three Cardinal Sins

The sinner received a terrible affliction called *tzara'as*. After the *metzora* does teshuva, sitting in isolation for a week while thinking about his sins and mistakes, God removes the *tzara'as* wound and the *metzora* brings his three sacrifices: *olah*, *chatas*, and *asham*. Why these three?

The Gemara (Yoma 9a) states that the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins: idolatry, promiscuity, and murder. In the Second Temple era, these three sins did not exist. But they did

speak *lashon hara* and had *sinas chinam*.

In this way, this fourth sin is equal to the three cardinal sins. Just as the three cardinal sins led to the destruction of the temple, so too *lashon hara* and *sinas chinam* led to the destruction of the temple. *Lashon hara* and *sinas chinam* are a disease that destroys society. Society cannot function properly unless it has harmony between people. Harmony enables people to get along smoothly. It is the oil that lubricates the joints of society. If a society has evil talk, petty jealousy, and hatred, it is like a joint that rubs against itself and eventually wears down and breaks. That society will be a fractured and sick society. How can Torah and mitzvos, which are so dependent upon a healthy Jewish society, be performed in a society sick with hatred?

Three Levels of Soul—and a Fourth

These three cardinal sins operate on the three levels of the Jewish soul. According to Kabbala and Chassidus, every human soul has three levels: *nefesh*, the biological life force level; *ruach*, the emotional level; and *neshama*, the intellectual level. Idolatry is a breakdown of the intellect. There is total confusion about the uniqueness of God and a misunderstanding of the fact that God doesn't have a physical form. Promiscuity has to do with a person's emotions and passions. And murder is destruction of the basic life force of a person, the *nefesh*.

Lashon hara has the possibility of destroying people on all three levels. It is the mistake of focusing on the evil of a person instead of on his mistaken actions. It is thus a distortion of intellect. *Lashon hara* also causes a breakdown of *ruach*, arousing passion, anger, jealousy, and crimes of spirit. On the *nefesh*-level, *lashon hara* is destructive to the fundamental fabric of society in a very real way.

Why Three Sacrifices

The three sacrifices that the *metzora* brings address these three levels of human activity. The *olah* is completely burnt on the mizbei'ach.

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 7:3) says that the korban *olah* atones for bad thoughts, because the *olah* is completely burnt; it goes completely to heaven. Thinking is the most unworldly part of us. It is our highest faculty, closest to our heavenly soul, the *neshama*. Thought is not visible, it is within a person's soul. Since the *olah* is the total sacrifice, it has to do with the thought and soul of man, atoning for improper, misguided thoughts. Since *lashon hara* comes from a misguided conceptualization of a sinner, it is a sin of thought. The korban *olah* atones for the

evil thinking of *lashon hara*.

The second sacrifice is the *chatas*, which is generally brought as an atonement for doing a sin. It relates to action. If someone accidentally and unintentionally desecrates the Shabbos in action, he brings a korban *chatas*. In order to be obligated to bring a *chatas*, a person must do an action; if he does not perform any action, he will not be obligated to bring a *chatas*. This korban thus atones for his sinful act. Since *lashon hara* affects a person's actions, the atonement of *lashon hara* must include a korban *chatas*.

Finally, the third korban is an *asham*. This is a special kind of korban that is hard to define precisely. It is uncommon, brought only under special circumstances. It is somewhere between thought and action, says the Shem Mishmuel. Thoughts of the mind flow into the heart and emotions. Then they flow into a person's body and are translated into action. The *asham* atones for the process of transition from thought into action, for the distorted emotional medium.

The person who speaks *lashon hara* has a distortion at every level of his being, rooted in anger, jealousy, and resentment. These are not proper ways of thinking, feeling, or acting. Therefore, he must bring all three kinds of sacrifices. He must bring an *olah* for his distorted thinking, an *asham* for inappropriate emotions, and a *chatas* for prohibited action. These atone respectively for the three levels of the soul involved in *lashon hara*.

Nega and Oneg, Affliction and Enjoyment

The Hebrew word for the affliction of *tzara'as* is *nega*, meaning wound. *Nega* is spelled *nun, gimel, ayin*. There is a strange statement in one of the Kabbalistic works that if you rearrange the letters of *nega*, you can spell the word *oneg*, pleasure. What does this signify?

We all enjoy Shabbos. The prophet Yeshaya (58:13) says you should call Shabbos a pleasure, an *oneg*. Sefer Yetzira, one of the earliest Kabbalistic books, says that the solution to the affliction of *tzara'as* is the *oneg*, enjoyment, of Shabbos. How does this work?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that the *tzara'as*, rooted in the sin of *lashon hara*, goes into the depths of the human soul. The enjoyment of Shabbos also touches the three levels of the human soul. In the Aseres Hadibros, the Torah alternately uses two different words for the commandment of Shabbos: *zachor* and *shamor*.

Shamor is the level of action. On Shabbos, we have to behave in a particular way. We have to avoid doing

the melachos. *Zachor* is the level of thought, meaning to be aware and think of Shabbos. Additionally, Chazal say that on Shabbos we should focus on Torah. We have special shiurim on Shabbos. On Shabbos, we have a very long leining with seven aliyos. Shabbos is a day of Torah study. Torah provides the connection between thought and action, channeling human thoughts into proper actions. It is a process of thinking, learning, analyzing, and conceptualizing about Torah ideas and topics and translating them into healthy emotions and actions.

Torah is in the thought of the person who studies it; it is in his emotions, and it is in the actions and mitzvos which he performs. Torah is a bridge that carries the concept from the highest faculty, the brain, to the heart and then into action.

By keeping Shabbos on three levels, the *metzora* can find the antidote to his *nega* of *tzara'as*. We can also keep the Shabbos fully by observing it on all three levels. The *zachor* of Shabbos means thinking of proper ideas on Shabbos. The *shamor* of Shabbos means acting appropriately, refraining from prohibited actions.

We also bridge the gap between thoughts and actions through the Torah study of Shabbos. This kind of Shabbos observance fixes the senseless, destructive hatred that people feel towards each other.

This is the destruction of the *nega*. If a person keeps Shabbos the proper way, his approach to other Jews will not be *nega*, hatred and affliction. Rather, it will rather be *oneg*, an enjoyment and pleasure.

Fighting Evil with Goodness

The Mishna (Avos 4:3) says, "*Al tehi baz lechol adam... she'ein lecha adam she'ein lo sha'ah*. Never totally disregard anyone. You never know when you might need that very person." This is sagacious advice. You may think you can yell and insult someone and call him names. But you never know; you may need him later. You might need a reference from him. This occurs frequently between employees and employers. Don't be so gruff and hasty in mistreating a person.

This advice of our Sages relates to our discussion of hating and being nasty to people. You might need that person one day, so it doesn't pay to be nasty today. But there is a deeper idea here, as well. Ever since Adam ate from the Eitz Hada'as, we all have a mixture of good and evil in everything we do. Our challenge is to distinguish between the good and evil. Hashem told us that He is

placing the decision before us. "I have placed life and death, good and evil before you ... Now choose life!" (Devarim 30:15-19).

Hashem wants us to choose good. But this commandment itself teaches us that evil is an option. We cannot avoid the struggle between good and evil. It is fundamental to our existence as human beings and especially as Jews. This mixture is ever-present within us.

If someone does something cruel to me, how should I think about it? It is acceptable and honest to think that, unfortunately, he gave in to his evil side. His good side would not have wanted to him to do this, but he is a human being and, sometimes, the bad overpowers the good. Sometimes, we don't choose life. If I am the victim of that person's horrible choice, what am I supposed to say? I should say that *nebach*, unfortunately, he fell and gave in to his evil side, as we all do sometimes. If, however, I respond to him with vindictiveness and hatred, I am only making things worse. I am providing more energy for his hatred to feed on. It will create even greater hatred in the world. Instead of a small fire of discord or even a moderate one, there will be a huge conflagration. When my hatred and his hatred combine, we share a great hatred together, and we are then both responsible for it.

The Mishna says, *al tehi baz lechol adam*. Don't be nasty to anyone, even if he was nasty to you. *Ein lecha adam she'ein lo sha'a*. Every person has his time. This person has a good side, too. Right now, his bad side is dictating his actions. But that's not really him. The good within the person is the true essence of his soul. The good is central to his personality, even though in this situation it was inoperative. If I broadcast goodness with a smile instead of *sinas chinam*, then my goodness will awaken within him his own goodness. My goodness will light the flame of goodness within him to conquer the evil within his soul.

Every stimulus causes a response. If the stimulus is love, it will one day evoke a loving response, even if not today or even anytime in the immediate future. There is no person who doesn't eventually have that potential moment of teshuva when he can get back on track. The goodness that you broadcast to your supposed enemy will eventually reach him and change his attitude.

This is more than good practical advice. It is correct moral and spiritual advice. No matter how bad that person is now, he can change if given a good chance. If we respond to hatred with hatred, the Gemara calls it *sinas chinam*. It is not justified. You cannot hate the person himself. That

kind of hatred is false and for nothing. It is destructive. Our response must be goodness. By showering goodness on a fellow Jew, we will light the goodness within his soul.

Had Bar Kamtza Stayed

Imagine if the Jews wouldn't have thrown Bar Kamtza out of the party. Bar Kamtza might have been willing to change. If they would have showered him with goodness, he could have become a ba'al teshuva. Instead of encouraging Rome to become a mortal enemy of Israel, he could have turned Rome into a friend. By being mean to him, however, the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed.

I would like to add the following true story one of my students told me. His wife went shopping in a Jewish neighborhood. At the end of the month, they received their bank statement and saw that on that day, a check had been cashed for a sheitel—a Jewish wig—for approximately \$2,000 with his wife's check. When he asked his wife about it, she said that she never bought that sheitel. Upon examining the check, they realized that the signature had been forged. They also discovered that the particular checkbook was missing. It was a clear case of fraud.

They contacted the sheitel merchant, who investigated and was able to identify the lady who bought the sheitel with the forged check. All kinds of accusatory thoughts entered their minds. How could a religious woman write

a forged check to buy a sheitel, a religious article? Should they press criminal charges against this wicked person in order to recover the sheitel and recover their money from the merchant?

The merchant told them to wait a little longer so she could do some more investigating. After a short time, the merchant reported to my student and his wife that the client was a poor woman, sick with cancer, who had lost all of her hair due to chemotherapy. My student then decided not to press charges, and the merchant returned the money. What happened to the sheitel is confidential.

This is a vivid illustration of how to deal with evil. Always think of the goodness of the Jewish person who had a moral lapse and did the evil deed. In this way, we atone for the sin of *sinas chinam* and become worthy for the ultimate and complete redemption of Israel. We cannot give up on anybody, even on our worst mortal enemy.

This is the lesson of the *metzora*. The Shem Mishmuel's deep and enlightening insight about Shabbos should inspire us. Shabbos is a day of love. On Shabbos, we must never fight and must only shower love upon one another. This is the way to bring us back to ahavas Yisrael, the right way for our society to function.

May it be a society of peace, friendship, love, and all goodness.

Lessons of a Sin Offering

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This week we read the double sedra of Tazria-Metzora. The sedra begins in Tazria with the eight pasukim dedicated to the tumas ha'yoledes (spiritual impurity of a woman post childbirth). Following this is a lengthy, detailed and intricate exploration of the spiritual malady of tzara'as, its physical symptoms, effects, diagnosis and ultimate habilitation by the kohen. Metzora concludes with the impurity of the zav and zavah (those impure from bodily discharge).

In regard to the new mother post childbirth (Vayikra 12:1-8), the days of her impurity are stated by the Torah (the impurity following childbirth, the count of her days of impurity, and the process of purification were very different in Temple times than they are today), as well as the korbanos she must offer as part of her purification. The pasuk tells us that she is to bring two korbanos, an olah (burnt offering) and a chatas (sin offering): *וּבְמִלֵּאת יְמֵי טְהָרָהּ, לֵבָן אוֹ לְבַת, תָּבִיא*

כִּבְשׁ בֶּן-שָׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה, וּבֶן-יוֹנָה אוֹ-תֹר לְחֹטְאֵת אֵל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד, אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן - And when the days of her purification are fulfilled, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb in its first year for a burnt-offering, and a turtle-dove for a sin-offering, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to the kohen (12:6).

A striking detail is noted in the Torah's listing of her offerings. Chazal teach that whenever a korban olah, a burnt offering, and a korban chatas, a sin offering, are simultaneously commanded in the Torah text, as a general rule, the chatas always precedes the olah. This makes sense, as first the sinner must renew his/her connection with G-d, rectify and repair past misdeeds (with the korban chatas), and only then can he/she offer the gift and appeasement of the burnt offering to G-d.

However, the one exception is here regarding the purification ritual of the yoledes. First we are told she brings an olah, and then she offers the chatas.

Complicating matters even further is that Chazal teach that in practice, the korbanos were offered in their usual order: olah, followed by chatas.

How are we to understand the reverse order as stated in the Torah text, as well as the reality of the offerings being offered in their usual order? What lesson does the Torah teach us with reversing the listing of the order of the korbanos of the yoledes? Of particular importance to us in our day and age, when we are so far removed from the avodas korbanos, is the search for meaning in a service we have no concrete way to relate to. Is there a lesson in these korbanos for us today, almost 2,000 years removed from the Temple service?

Certainly, the answer is yes, for the words of Torah are timeless and apply to each and every generation. If so, it behooves us to understand the message of these offerings, so we may study, learn and apply the lessons to our own lives, even in the absence of the Temple.

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin, in his *Unlocking the Torah Text*, suggests a novel and unique interpretation. “Perhaps,” he writes, “the Torah symbolically changes the sequence of the korbanot on this one occasion because this is the only case where a sin offering is brought not for a sin that occurred in the past but for one that is bound to occur in the future.

“The moment of childbirth is a moment of rarefied personal perspective... In that instant, cradling a newborn child in one’s arms, you recognize with unerring clarity that nothing in the world is more important to you than this child, than this precious gift that G-d has bestowed upon you.

“But then... Three months later, at two o’clock in the morning, when, more tired than you have ever been in your life, you are changing the diaper of a screaming infant; when, three years later, you are running in circles after a stubborn and difficult toddler; when, fifteen years later, your teenage son or daughter rolls his or her eyes at you in that frustrating way, as only a teenager can...

“At those moments, somehow, that child doesn’t seem quite so precious. You lose sight of the clear instant when

you held a new life in your hands, when nothing was more important than the life and welfare of that newborn child.

“Perhaps the korban chatat of the yoledet is listed second because it addresses the future rather than the past. This particular sin offering is brought for all the inevitable moments when the crystal-clear perspective accompanying childbirth will be lost, for all the times when this precious life will not be appreciated as dearly as it was at the moment of its arrival.

“And maybe, in this one instance, the korban chatas will perform its task proactively. Perhaps the offering will serve as a reminder to work a little harder on the retention of perspective, so that we do not lose sight of the most precious gift granted to us by a loving G-d” (*Unlocking the Torah Text, Vayikra*, p.98-100).

What a profound and important insight into human nature. The same can be said of the many, many blessings in our lives. When a new blessing is bestowed upon us, we are often awed by the kindness of the One Who is Good and Does Good. And the excitement, the appreciation, the thanks, the humility lasts for a certain amount of time. And after some time... as is the general way of the human condition, the feelings of gratitude slowly dissipate and wear off, perhaps to the point where we forget we have been blessed at all.

And so, the Torah lists the chatas after the olah, as an allusion to the sin of ingratitude and forgetfulness that may occur at some time in the future. In the korbanos of the yoledes, the Torah comes to teach us a fundamental lesson about living with an attitude of gratitude. While life has many ups and downs, highs and lows, and good times along with difficult times, we must never lose focus of the bountiful and boundless blessings that the RS”O bestows upon us.

May we humbly and wisely learn the lesson of the yoledes and her offerings, so that perhaps every day of our lives will be a day when we recognize the need to offer a (proverbial) korban todah to the Tov v’Ha’Meitiv.

The Joy of Going Chutz L’Machane

Rabbi Efram Goldberg

Parshas Metzora outlines the procedure by which a metzora who has been cured of his tzara’as infection regains his status of tahara (purity) so he can return to his city from which he had been banished. At

the beginning of this process, the Torah commands, ויצא הכהן אל מחוץ למחנה – the kohen must go outside the city to inspect the metzora and determine that נגעה נרפא נגע הצרעה – the metzora’s infection has indeed healed (14:3).

The Tolna Rebbe shelit”a notes the comment of the Midrash in a separate context (Pesikta Zutresa, Parshas Balak) that the word הנה implies שמחה, something that is done joyfully. Applying this connotation of הנה to our pasuk, the Tolna Rebbe concludes that the Torah requires the kohen to go outside the city to the metzora happily, with joy and enthusiasm.

The kohen is told to leave the sacred, spiritual environment of the Beis Ha’mikdash and go חוץ למחנה, outside the camp, to help a sinner who had been stricken with tzara’as because of his wrongdoing, compelling him to live in solitude and isolation far away from other people. And the kohen is expected to go there joyously, excited over the fact that the metzora has been cured.

The Tolna Rebbe explains that the kohen is to feel such genuine love and affection for every Jew, even the lowly metzora banished outside the camp, that he should rejoice over the opportunity to go חוץ למחנה to help him and bring him back. A leader’s love for his fellow Jews is manifest not inside the “Beis Ha’mikdash,” not when everything is pure and pristine, but specifically when there is a need to leave מחנה, to leave the serenity of the Mikdash, to help the fellow Jew struggling with difficult problems and

complex situations. The Torah does not permit the kohen to remain in the Beis Ha’mikdash, in the “ivory tower.” He is instructed to go, when necessary, חוץ למחנה to help those who find themselves distant from that tower, and he is told to do so not begrudgingly, but joyously, out of a deep sense of love, affection and devotion to each and every one of his fellow Jews.

There are many people today who are situated חוץ למחנה, outside the “camp,” who feel rejected or distanced from the community. It might be an aguna who feels abandoned and disillusioned. It might be somebody who has chosen not to follow the path of traditional observance, and feels estranged by the community. It is our responsibility to go to these and others like them חוץ למחנה, to lend them a hand, to show them support, to extend friendship. And we are to do so בשמחה, joyfully, fueled by our deep sense of unconditional love for all our precious fellow Jews. We are not entitled to remain comfortably inside the מחנה, in our shuls and batei midrash. Our love for every Jew must lead us to enthusiastically go חוץ למחנה to connect with those who, for whatever reason, find themselves outside the community, to show them affection and lend them support.

Speak No Evil

Rabbi Steven Gotlib

Much of parshiyot Tazria and Metzora deal with the mysterious ailment of tzaraat. Though often translated into English as something similar to leprosy, it is unclear what this discolouring condition actually is. One thing, though, is generally accepted: the cause of tzaraat is spiritual, rather than physical. In fact, our Sages often assume one particular cause - lashon hara (roughly translated as improper speech). [See Arachin 16a-b.] Many commentators even note that the term metzora (meaning, one who suffers from tzaarat) itself is an acronym of motzi shem ra - one who indulges in lashon hara. The association with lashon hara stems most obviously from Bamidbar Chapter 12, in which Miriam and Aharon are stricken with tzaraat for speaking negatively of their brother Moshe Rabbeinu’s actions. Narratively, this event is seen as important enough to be repeated in Sefer Devarim, when Moshe Rabbeinu implores the people to remember what happened to his sister.

But what is it that makes lashon hara a serious enough violation to warrant such an extreme response from on high? Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l wrote that Judaism is fundamentally “a religion of words and silences, speaking and listening, communicating and attending.” (I Believe: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible, Parshat Metzora) A major part of Judaism, after all, is emulating Hashem. Hashem created the entire cosmos in which we find ourselves, using only His words. So too, we must use our words carefully and creatively.

But our obligations go deeper than that. Rabbi Sacks goes on to note that while most ancient religions put up physical monuments to their gods in order to feel some level of connection with them, Jews need only use our words to achieve the same sense of connection. As my teacher (himself a student of Rabbi Sacks), Rabbi Dr. Sam Lebens once put it, other religions might believe that divinity needs to be personified in order to enter the world, but Judaism believes that Hashem enters our world

through the words of Torah that we study day and night. As the Maggid of Mezritch wrote, “A person is not entirely separate from the letters that he speaks; his physical body is distinct, but not his lifeforce. So it is with the blessed One, Who is not separate from the letters [of the Torah].” (Magid Devarav L’Yaakov, pg. 126)

If we realize the importance of our words, and seek to emulate Hashem through our use of them, then we will naturally come to realize that misusing words can be abominable. As Rabbi Sacks concludes, “we need the laws of lashon hara now more than almost ever before. Social media is awash with hate. The language of politics has become ad hominem and vile. We seem to have forgotten what Tazria and Metzora are here to remind us: that **evil speech is a plague. It destroys relationships, rides roughshod over people’s feelings, debases the public square, turns politics into a jousting match between competing egos, and defiles all that is sacred about our**

The Torah’s Home Security System

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In parashat Metzora, the second of this week’s double parashiot, we learn how the disease *tzara’at* (sometimes, incorrectly translated as leprosy), at times, infects not only people’s bodies, but their homes and residences as well.

In Leviticus 14:34 we read, *כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, אֲשֶׁר אֶנִּי נֹתֵן לְכֶם לְאֶחְזָהּ, וְנִתְחַי נֶגַע צָרַעַת, בְּבַיִת אֶרֶץ אֶחְזָתְכֶם: “And when you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, I will place the plague of tzara’at upon a house in the land of your possession...”*

The Torah subsequently informs us, that if the owner of a home notices a red or green stain on the walls of his home, he is to immediately report it to the *כהן*—Cohen, the Priest. Upon arrival, the Priest instructs the owner to empty the entire house of its possessions before entering or examining the structure. If the symptoms on the wall are inconclusive, the Cohen places the house under quarantine for seven days. If on the seventh day the Priest finds the spot lighter, the area that contained the spot must be removed by scraping and replastering. The house is then declared pure or ritually fit.

If, however, the spot is found to be unchanged on the seventh day inspection, the Priest may quarantine the house for another seven days. If, on the thirteenth day,

common life. It need not be like this” (emphasis in the original).

Our words come with a tremendous amount of power, which requires a great amount of responsibility to properly wield. The way that we speak about ourselves and others directly impacts how we see the world and interact with it. It is, as a matter of fact, our ability to speak thoughtfully that makes us bearers of the Divine Image in the first place. As Rashi notes, the *nefesh chayah* that was granted to humanity is what gave us the ability to think and to speak. (Rashi on Bereishit 2:7)

Our words could set us up for good or cause us to trip and fall. Let us all try to be more mindful in our speech, and, in turn, our actions as well. As Rabbi Leo Dee so beautifully said in the wake of unimaginable tragedy, we humans are blessed with the ability to differentiate between good and bad. “If we move forward in doing good, more good will get done this week than last week.”

when the Priest inspects the spot, it has become lighter in color, the owner must scrape off the spot and the surrounding area, replaster it and the home is declared ritually fit. In order to finalize the purity of the house, however, the owner must bring an offering of two birds to the Temple as atonement for any sinful behavior on his part that may have caused the blemish.

If, however, after the second inspection the spot has spread, the owner is required to remove the stones on which the spots were found, scrape the surrounding area, and replaster the entire house. The house is then placed under quarantine for a third seven-day period, and on the nineteenth day from the first inspection, the Priest visits again to see if the spot has continued to spread. If it has, the Priest orders the entire house demolished and the debris removed to a place beyond city limits.

As one might expect, the commentators are perplexed by this unusual set of laws. As we have explained in our analysis of previous years, most of the commentators attribute the *tzara’at* disease to *לְשׁוֹן הָרַע*—*l’shon harah*--speaking evil. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch brilliantly suggests that although the biblical text is out of chronological sequence, the first signs of the *tzara’at* disease usually appear in the slanderer’s home. If the speaker of evil

persists in his errant behavior, the symptoms appear closer to his body-on his clothes. If he still does not stop his sinful ways and continues his habit of evil speech, the symptoms then spread to his own physical body.

Once the disease is diagnosed as tzara'at, the speaker of evil must leave, not only his home, but the entire camp and remain outside the camp. Outside the camp, where the sheep and flocks graze, there is not much opportunity to speak evil! If, however, the speaker of evil still does not repent, his entire body is afflicted with the disease and he is declared "pure," allowing him to return to the camp. Why pure? Because now that he's completely covered from head-to-foot with the disease, the violator of evil speech must face the consequences and the ridicule of being known publicly by all as a chronic gossip and slanderer. He can no longer hide as he had done before when his house was torn down "for remodeling," and his wardrobe burnt because "they were out of style."

Other commentators, such as the Ibn Ezra claim that the chance of the tzara'at disease appearing in the walls of a house is very slight. He notes that tzara'at only appears in homes that are located in the land of Israel--the Jewish homeland. This is because the land is so sanctified that any sign of moral and spiritual impropriety will result in a plague.

The author of the Sefer Ha'Chinuch cites the Midrash that states that when the Canaanites heard that the children of Israel were approaching the land to capture it, they quickly hid their treasures of gold in the walls of their homes. G-d therefore afflicted these homes with tzara'at, so that the Israelites might have to destroy the houses, only to discover the valuable treasures. Other commentaries reject this theory out of hand.

Whatever the Divine purpose of afflicting a home with the plague of tzara'at, the message of the plague resounds clearly.

The well-known aphorism, "walls have ears," may have much to teach us in this instance. When reading the description of the biblical affliction of tzara'at, it may be easily concluded (incorrectly, we must add) that we're referring to something similar to mildew. Home dwellers who have experienced mildew in their dwellings know what havoc it may wreak. It has now been confirmed that many serious medical disorders result from exposure to severe mildew--including stomach problems, inability to concentrate, skeletal pain, and even incontinence. Mildew is a malady that frequently is not visible, often has no smell,

can't be touched, but the homeowner knows it's there, and it is very difficult to eliminate once it infects a location.

Ironically, there may be a lesson to learn from second-hand cigarette smoke. After many years of scientific research, it has been conclusively confirmed that secondhand cigarette smoke has a deleterious impact on all the residents in the smoker's home. Children who live in homes of heavy smokers may contract asthma or develop lesions on their lungs, or, G-d forbid, even cancer.

Our rabbis often speak of the "sanctity of the Jewish home." The Talmud praises women who were so righteous that the walls of their homes never saw an immodest act or behavior. They tell of the family that was so diligent in guarding their speech that no evil or improper word was ever spoken within the portals of their home.

To those of us who struggle to live proper lives in an ever-challenging contemporary environment, the message is resoundingly clear: A home is not merely a home, it is a "sanctuary," as sacred as the Temple in Jerusalem! A home should not only be a dwelling place for family members, but a dwelling place for the Divine Presence, as well. As important as it is to keep the furniture in the home clean and dusted and the walls properly plastered and painted, it is equally important to keep the tone of the house pure, and the conversation of the house proper. As important as it is to have attractive and functional furnishings in a home, it is equally important to have attractive and functional values and behaviors. As important as it is to have nutritious and appetizing meals, it is equally important to have nutritious and appetizing role models to ensure that the moral, ethical and spiritual diet of the children and all the home's residents is properly balanced and administered with diligent care and supervision.

While a home may be considered "one man's castle," the values of that castle are what provide the real security. Yes, the values, not the walls, provide the real security!