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Tazria 5784

Jewish Mothers: Co-Creators

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered April 19, 1969)

The figure of the Jewish mother has always been rather sacrosanct in traditional Jewish life and lore. Even in ages of transition, during and after the Emancipation, when all that was sacred was held up to criticism and analysis, the Jewish mother somehow remained above the din of battle and emerged unscathed.

In recent years, however, the classical type which comes to mind when we speak of the Jewish mother, has become more and more replaced by a new and competing sort of mother. Furthermore, there has been a trend in English literature, both in this country and in England, subjecting the Jewish mother to withering criticism, and attempting to debunk her value and influence.

We shall leave this contemporary reaction against the Jewish mother to our next sermon. This morning we shall make some remarks about a universal aspect of motherhood, namely, motherhood as creativity.

There can be little question that childbearing is the most immediately, directly, and obviously creative act known to mankind, even if it is not deliberate, but unconscious and perhaps even involuntary. By the act of giving birth, a woman performs the creative act of perpetuating the species, of adding another link in the chain of generations.

But is this act purely biological, or does it have any religious value? Is it an ordinary, natural process, devoid of special spiritual significance, or does it, even as a natural act, participate in a higher order of meaning?

Our question is intensified by what appears to be a decidedly negative answer. In reading of the phenomenon of childbirth, at the very beginning of this morning's Sidra, we learn that it occasions a period of tum'ah or uncleanness, for a period of seven days for the birth of a boy and fourteen for a girl. Does this not indicate that the religious significance, if any, of childbirth is negative, that perhaps the Torah rejects its animality, its primitiveness, its thorough and exclusive naturalness, as opposed to any

transcendent significance?

To answer that question, and therefore to derive some Jewish insight into the nature of motherhood from the sources of our tradition, we shall draw on three different expositors of Judaism: a late medieval Spanish Jew, the author of the *Or Ha-Hayyim*; Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, the spiritual leader of 19th century Polish Jewry; and an Italian Jew, a modern scholar, the late Professor Cassuto, who was Professor of Bible at Hebrew University.

Let us turn to the first act of childbirth recorded in the Torah. Eve, the first woman, gives birth to her first child, Cain. She calls him Cain because, the Torah tells us in four obscure words, קניתי איש את השם. Taken singly, these words are well known: קניתי - *I have bought or acquired*; איש - *a man*; את - *from or with*; השם - *God*. But what do they mean taken together? Our commentators provide a host of answers, most of them interesting but unsatisfactory.

Professor Cassuto offers what appears to be the most valid answer by revealing to us the true meaning of the word קניתי. He points to another expression in Genesis in which this word is used. When Malki Zedek, the king of Salem, greets Abraham, he blesses him by saying: Blessed be Abraham to the highest God, קונה שמים וארץ. That phrase, which we use in our prayers as well, should be translated simply as: "*Who buys or acquires heaven and earth.*" Now that is a strange phrase indeed! The mind is boggled at its implications: as if God put a down payment on the heavens and secured a mortgage on the earth as He purchased all this real estate... from whom? Obviously, the word קנה, which means to buy or purchase or acquire in later Hebrew, had a somewhat different meaning in earlier Hebrew. Indeed so, says Professor Cassuto, and the Hebrew is related to the Canaanite and both of them mean: to create, to form, to make. קנה is a synonym of ברא, to create. Abraham was blessed in the name of the One Who creates heaven and earth.

And that is the meaning of Eve's triumphant cry upon the birth of the first human child: "I have created a man with the Lord!" Until now I was only a creature; now I am also a creator. My own body has become the instrument of an act which heretofore was reserved only for God, that of creation. God has invited man – nay, woman! – to become His co-creator. And so, with the Lord, I too have created a man, a child.

This means that childbirth is an act of *imitatio Dei*, imitation of God, it is an act of participation in the divine activity. As such, it is characterized by the quality of *kedushah*, holiness. When man performs something that is principally a divine act, he participates in the divine holiness.

That is why, the Rabbi of Kotzk teaches us, childbirth is followed by a period of *tum'ah*, of ritual impurity. For the principle to remember is this: wherever there is *kedushah*, and then the holiness departs, the void is filled with its opposite, with its mirror image: *tum'ah*, impurity. The halakhic state of impurity marks the contrast between the sacred and the profane; it highlights the grace of holiness which was present and which now has departed. The best illustration of this relationship of *tum'ah* being attendant upon the departed *kedushah*, is that of life and death. The chief source of ritual impurity is a dead body, a cadaver. According to the Kotzker's explanation, we understand it: as long as man lives and breathes, as long as he is possessed of life, he participates in the holiness of the Living God. He bears a soul, a spark of God within him. Living man therefore possesses *kedushah*. But when he dies, when his spirit leaves him, when his life seeps away, then *kedushah* departs, and *tum'ah* must enter. That is why the cadaver is a source of *tum'ah*. Similarly, when a woman bears life within her, she is in a state of imitation of God, she is a co-creator with Him, and therefore she reaches a high level of *kedushah*. The act of childbearing is itself pregnant with religious experience. But once the act is done, and the child is born, and the body has been emptied of this precious burden it has borne for these many months, *kedushah* has left it, and hence there must follow a period of *tum'ah*, of uncleanness.

Watchamacallit

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

The laws of *tzora'as*, an affliction commonly, if questionably, translated, based on the Septuagint, as leprosy, are very intricate and require a great deal of expertise in their own application. Their actual implementation is in the hands of the Kohanim, who

So that the state of ritual impurity attendant upon childbirth is not meant as the negative judgment upon motherhood but, on the contrary, as a tribute to its essential *kedushah*.

In that case, we can understand why the period of *tum'ah* should be twice as long for the birth of a girl as for the birth of a boy. For if the birth of a child, a human being, is a high form of creativity which bestows *kedushah* upon the mother, and an equivalent degree of *tum'ah* when the act of childbirth has been accomplished, then the birth of a girl calls for twice the length of the period of impurity; for the female of the species, unlike the male, possesses, in turn, the potential for bearing yet another generational and repeating this sublime act of creativity. To give birth to one who in turn can give birth, to create one who will later create, is to achieve double the holiness of bearing a human being who cannot perform this act within himself; and therefore the period of *tum'ah* is twice as long, just a larger object casts a longer shadow. Thus, explains the author of the *Or Ha-Hayyim*, the longer period of *tum'ah* for the birth of a girl is not an anti-feminist notion but, quite the contrary, an acknowledgement of the natural creativity of woman.

So that motherhood is an act of the imitation of God. This does not make of all mothers either saints or artists, but it does mean that there is something innate, something integral to motherhood, that inspires reverence and demand's hesitation at the very least before holding up the institution to ridicule.

And just as woman, by virtue of motherhood, imitates God, God returns the compliment: He imitates mother. For thus we read in today's Haftorah, the Haftorah for Rosh Hodesh: כַּאֲשֶׁר אִשָּׁר אִמּוֹ תִנְחַמְנוּ כֵן אֲנֹכִי אֲנַחֲמָכֶם; "even as a man whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort thee."

We in our generation have been personal witnesses to God taking on the role of mother. For we have seen God comfort our people. For so does that verse end with two significant words: וּבִירוּשָׁלַיִם תִּנּוּחַמוּ, "and in Jerusalem shall you be comforted."

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are exclusively empowered to declare a person to be a *metzora*, or a spot as *tzora'as*. This power of the Kohein is not dependent on his knowledge of the laws. Even if he is ignorant of the laws of *tzora'as*, a non-kohein who is an expert in the laws can observe the spot, and, determining

it to be tzora'as, give this information over to the kohein, who then makes the declaration. The non-kohein, however, is not authorized to make this declaration. What is the meaning behind this Halacha? Why must the kohein be the one to make the declaration?

Rabbi Mordechai Ilan, in his Mikdash Mordechai, explains, on the basis of a verse in Malachi (2:7), that the lips of the kohein have special status. The prophet tells us, "For the lips of the kohein safeguard knowledge, and people should seek knowledge from his mouth, for he is an agent of God, Master of Legions." The kohein's mouth has a special sanctity, him being an agent of God, and, therefore, as the Talmud in the beginning of Pesachim tells us, a person who presumes to be a kohein but speaks inappropriately, in a repugnant fashion, arouses suspicion that he is, in fact, not a kohein. A true kohein would not speak in such a way. This feature of the kohein is what gives him the ability to pronounce the pure or impure status of a possible tzora'as afflicted spot. Tzora'as comes most prominently as a punishment for leshon hora, or evil talk, by which a person effectively declares that his mouth has no restraints and can be used in any way he wishes. To offset this notion, the kohein, whose mouth, by definition, is controlled and sanctified, is empowered to declare the consequences of this attitude.

Tzoras, Kohen, and Ahavah

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed by TurboScribe.ai and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally recorded on April 10, 2024, and presented on April 08, 2021 at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim.)

Parshas Tazria deals mostly with the skin condition of tzara'as, the halachos of determining its tumah, and achieving tahara. And one figure that appears repeatedly in this Parsha is the Kohen. Everything in the Parsha is about you going to the Kohen and him performing various activities. And a very basic halacha in the Parsha of tzara'as is that the tumah and tahara of tzara'as can only take effect—be chal—based on Kohen's declaration. And no matter what the reality, no matter what the halacha technically says, no matter how many Talmidei Chachamim evaluate it, the tzara'as is not tamei unless a Kohen says it is tamei. Likewise, when the tzara'as ostensibly gets cured, unless the Kohen says it's tahor, the tzara'as is not tahor. Why is the Kohen's role so important here?

So many classic Mefarshim—and Rav Hirsch among them, who actually has a very nice elaboration on this—explain that it's to teach us the main point of the

Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, zt"l, as cited by his student, Rav Yissochor Frand, shlit"a' suggests a somewhat different explanation for the kohein's control of the implementation of tzora'as. People who speak leshon hora, he says, feel that they are not doing anything wrong, for, after, all, mere words have no value. Therefore, the kohein, by his mere words, even when declared without any thought or study, but just repeating what someone else said, creates a situation of tzora'as, to demonstrate that words are, in fact, quite powerful.

As a supplement to Rav Ruderman's explanation, perhaps we can suggest a further insight. Rav Avrohom Pam, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaath, reportedly was very opposed to the use of the expression "watchamacallit" because it reflected a lack of thought before speaking, and, he felt, a person should never speak without thinking first. In truth, leshon hora often consists of words spoken without prior thought and consideration. In order to bring home to the person the potential effect of such speech, the kohein can make his declaration of pure or impure, even without prior thought on his part, merely repeating the evaluation of the expert. In this way, he will learn, very starkly, the potential destructiveness of words without thought.

Parsha of tzara'as. Usually, when you have a disease, you go to a doctor trained to deal with the physical world because it is a physical manifestation of some underlying pathology. And by telling you to go to a Kohen, the Torah is telling you that tzara'as is not a regular disease or part of the regular workings of the physical world. Rather, it is a specific divine intervention. Of course, Hashem runs the entire world, but He does so from behind the scenes, as it were. Tzara'as, however, is a specific, direct, Divine intervention where Hashem gives us Mussar for something. Perhaps it's because of Lashon Hara. And Chazal list other potential causes as well. And therefore, you go to Kohen and not the doctor because you recognize you're getting a message from Hashem. The Kohen does not only pronounce tamei or tahor but perhaps gives you a little Mussar and tells you what to do or not so that you can improve yourself and deserve a cure.

However, one question remains. If it's just a message

from Hashem that you need to improve yourself spiritually, you don't need to go to a Kohen. You could go to a Rabbi. The Torah often talks about *ha-kohanim ha-leviim, ve-el ha-shofeit asher yihyeh ba-yamim ha-heim*—going to the Kohanim and the Leviim and the judges and the elders, and practically, this means a Talmid Chacham—what we would call a Rabbi. There are no other halachic determinations for which you must go to a Kohen. We go to a Rabbi for everything—all our shailas, Hataras Nedarim, etc. A judgment in Dinei Mamonos, you go to one or three Rabbis. Yet, there's only one halachic determination that a Rabbi cannot make. No matter how big a Rabbi is, if he's not a Kohen, his pronouncement of tumah or tahara of tzara'as will not help. And no matter how ignorant the Kohen is, his declaration still works. So why does the Torah davka require a Kohen for this, and not a Rabbi?

I saw a beautiful explanation that points out a difference between a Kohen and a Rabbi. Well, who was the first Kohen? Of course, Aharon. And who was the first Rabbi? Moshe Rabbeinu. What's the difference between Aharon and Moshe? At the beginning of Maseches Sanhedrin, Chazal tell us that Moshe said: *Yikov ha-din es ha-har*. Din is the din—let's just judge objectively and let the chips fall where they may. But Aharon ha-Kohen was *ohev shalom ve-rodeif sholem ohev es ha-brios, u-mekarvan la-Torah*. Moshe told you what was right and what was wrong. But Aaron expressed love towards you, and this inspired you to improve your ways and act better. The Medrash says that when someone did something wrong, Aharon would just show him so much love that the person naturally wanted to improve himself. We find the same in the case of Birkas Kohanim. What is the job of a Kohen? It's not the same job as the Rabbi or the Navi—to frankly tell everyone exactly what their spiritual status is. Rather, it's *le-vareich es amo Yisroel be-ahavah*—the Kohen must always bless the Jewish

people be-ahavah. There are many halachos and minhagim based on the fact that the Kohen cannot do Birkas Kohanim if he doesn't love the Jewish people.

There are two kinds of Mussar. There's Mussar of an objective judgment—like in a Beis Din—of who's right and who's wrong and how right and wrong they are. Then, there's the Mussar of the Kohanim. It's the kind of Mussar that comes from ahavah. I love you so much. I believe in you so much that I really think you're much better than you're acting right now. That's the Mussar of Aharon ha-Kohen. And maybe davka a Kohen has to examine tzara'as because if someone reached a point where Hashem has to send them a special message—a divine intervention, an almost miraculous patch—then someone telling him: You know, you're a bad guy, is not going to help. The person will say: If I'm a bad guy, what's the point? Instead, he must go to a Kohen, and he will tell him: You are great! You have tremendous potential. You're a good guy. You could be so much more than you are now. You just need to improve in this way or that, and you can be amazing. Only someone who believes in him can give him the kind of Mussar he needs to rise from the depths of tzara'as. And no matter how deep this Jew has fallen, he needs to go to a Kohen who will tell him: You are so great that you can improve your ways. You are so great that the way you've been acting is not becoming of you. I believe that you can be much better than you are now. Maybe that's why the metzora'a has to bring his tzara'as to the Kohen.

And that's a Mussar for all of us—even if we're not a Kohen. If we want to get others to improve their ways—in a world stricken with so many spiritual ailments that are perhaps even worse than tzara'as of once upon a time—we need to be like the Kohen and say: I love you and I believe in you, and you can definitely do better. Then, maybe we can have an influence on them, actually make them better, and bring Am Yisrael closer to Avihem she-ba-Shomayim.

Strategic Solitude

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

In Parshat Tazria, we read about the physically and psychologically painful skin disease known as tzara'at. While afflicted, the person's "clothes are to be torn, his hair disheveled, his upper lip is to be covered, and he is to call out, 'impure, impure'" (Lev. 13:45). This is in addition to needing to "dwell alone; outside of the camp is his dwelling place" (Lev. 13:46). The Sages, perhaps noticing the parallel to mourning rituals, likened someone afflicted

with tzara'at, a metzora, to someone who is dead. Who is this person mourning? The metzora is mourning himself.

This stark association with death, writes Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz in his Sichot Mussar, is not made by the Sages because of the immense physical anguish experienced by the metzora. Rather it reflects the social isolation incurred while afflicted. The separation signifies a sense of social death.

As is evident from the medical literature, and as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks elaborated on in his first chapter of *Morality*, prolonged loneliness can be hazardous; it has negative ramifications for anxiety, depression, cardiovascular disease, and other serious illnesses. As social beings, we need meaningful connections to others for our psychological and physical health.

Yet, mere social associations on their own are not inherently beneficial. Toxic relationships can be just as harmful as isolation. Tzara'at, according to the Sages, was a punishment for lashon hara, evil speech. As a consequence of antagonistic social behavior, the metzora is separated from social activity. "He separated between husband and wife and between one person and another" through his evil speech, "therefore he is punished with tzara'at, and the Torah says: "He shall dwell alone" (Arkhin 16b). The punishment fits the crime. In Dr. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg's formulation, he "enacts his own toxic relationship with the world" (*The Hidden Order of Intimacy*). He stigmatized others, so he is, in turn, stigmatized. He used language to denigrate and label others, so his condition is reduced to one word: "impure."

This punishment does not just reflect a measure for measure enactment of Divine justice, but also entails restorative aspects, encouraging a process of penitence. While isolation and loneliness can be harmful, there are potential benefits to being alone. In their article "Leave Well Enough Alone? The Costs and Benefits of Solitude," Robert Coplan, John Zelenski, and Julie Bowker review the literature and identify self-reflection, self-exploration, self-renewal, stress reduction, and creativity as positive outcomes that emerge from solitude. There are spiritual

benefits as well. Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam dedicates the thirteenth and final chapter of his *Guide to Serving God* to the essentiality of solitude for encountering God. This behavior, known as hitbodedut – withdrawing into one's own company and contemplation - was accentuated by Jewish mystics as fundamental for cultivating an inner spiritual life.

The metzora is afforded the opportunity to self-reflect, introspect, and ultimately restore a positive attitude towards others. It was the task of the metzora to capitalize on the solitude for repentance and self-transformation. He needed to uncover his character flaws and abandon his hostile and antisocial view of others. Through his loneliness and isolation, he will hopefully long for a second chance to foster caring and compassionate relationships.

A determinative factor, according to a recent study by Netta Weinstein and colleagues, as to whether solitude is psychologically beneficial or harmful, is if it is autonomously chosen ("Balance Between Solitude and Socializing"). Deliberate decisions to disconnect from the social world allow us to benefit positively. Perhaps before contracting tzara'at, the metzora would have benefited from autonomously choosing strategic solitude. If only he would have taken a step back from his growingly unhealthy social interactions to reflect before they turned toxic, he could have avoided the social harm he instigated.

From this perspective, solitude is both the punishment and the prophylactic strategy to avoid the punishment. If we proactively choose restorative solitude to reflect on our spiritual and social values, we will be able to cultivate and maintain more healthy, supportive, and nurturing relationships.

The Kohen on Your Team

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Hashem conveyed the korban manual in exclusive conversations with Moshe; see Vayikra 1:1, 4:1, 6:1, 6:12, 6:22 and 6:28, for example. Our parshah of Tazria opens with laws of tumah and birth; again, it's only for Moshe's ears. But when Hashem introduces the tumah of tzaraat in Vayikra 14:1, Aharon is present alongside Moshe. Why?

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra and other commentators explain that this is because kohanim are responsible to examine tzaraat and declare it tamei or tahor. Aharon's presence highlights the task of the kohanim [For another approach, see Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.]

But Ramban raised a question. It is true that Aharon receives direct instruction regarding tumah of tzaraat, but when Hashem teaches the process of taharah (purification) in 14:1, Aharon is no longer in the audience. What happened? The role of the kohen in taharah is as crucial as the role of the kohen regarding tumah!

Ramban explained that Aharon's presence wasn't only because the mitzvah was in his jurisdiction; Aharon was present because the honor of a Divine audience would energize the kohanim toward their task. When did the kohanim need that incentive? It was only necessary for their role in diagnosing tumah, generally an unhappy

activity of delivering painful news. On the other hand, helping people to become tahor would be fulfilling, and the kohanim would not need any special inspiration to pursue that.

Ramban's comment helps address a classic talmudic question (Yoma 19a-b) about kohanim: whose side are they on? Are they Hashem's delegates to us, or our agents to lobby Hashem? If they were on Hashem's side, then I might expect them to be alacritous in declaring people tamei, carrying Hashem's rebuke for misconduct. They would need no incentive. But in Ramban's view, the kohen

is a human being, interceding with Hashem on our behalf. He feels for the people who come to him. Therefore he draws no joy from declaring someone a metzora, and Hashem needs to urge him to play that role. But the kohen is thrilled to declare Tahor! For that he needs no incentive at all. [Perhaps this is consistent with the berachah of birkat kohanim, which mentions that the kohanim bless the Jewish people lovingly.]

May we learn from the love of the kohanim for us, and find our satisfaction not in identifying tumah, but in detecting and declaring each other's taharah.

The Power of Words

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Tazria, we are introduced to the Biblical illness known as Tzara'as. This condition has no translation into English (it is not leprosy) for it was not a physical illness, such as a bacteria or virus, as we know illnesses today. Tzara'as was a spiritual malady with a physical manifestation. The afflicted individual was spiritually sick, due to a number of grave sins committed on his part. Chazal, in Arachin 16a, list the seven sins that cause tzara'as: 1) lashon harah, 2) murder, 3) false oaths, 4) immorality, 5) arrogance, 6) theft, and 7) stinginess (lit. tzarus ayin - having a narrow, negative eye towards others).

These seven sins are all related to sins of speech in some way or another. Furthermore, according to Rashi's commentary to Tazria-Metzora, the primary sin associated with tzara'as is lashon harah, slanderous speech.

In a pithy and very powerful comment, Rav Soloveitchik zt'l once noted, "If you want to know what lashon harah is, whatever you enjoy when you talk about someone else is lashon harah" (The Rav Thinking Aloud, Holzer, p.190).

As a result of this sin, Hashem would send a spiritual sign of his illness to the sinner, in the form of tzara'as. The nega tzara'as could appear on the walls of one's home, or on his garments, or on his very own self.

The only diagnosis and treatment possible occurred under the auspices of the kohen, further proof that this was a spiritual illness, which had to be treated by the spiritual leader (and not a doctor). Once the kohen - and only the kohen - declared the affliction to be a nega tzara'as, after a physical exam of the nega and subsequent determination of the nega as tzara'as, the afflicted individual was sent into isolation outside of all three camps (machaneh Shechina, Levayah and Yisrael), banished from G-d, keviyachol, and from the nation. His sin was so abhorrent that he

was not even allowed to dwell with others who were tamei (spiritually impure). In isolation he would remain, contemplating his sin, and forced to inform passersby that he was impure and that they must stay away. Any time someone would pass by outside the camp, he had to call out "impure, impure" about himself. The same mouth that shamed others would now bring shame upon himself. In isolation he would dwell, mourning for the proverbial murder he committed with his slanderous words and the divide between man and fellow man that his poisonous words created. Since he caused a separation between friends, and between husband and wife with his toxic speech, he would be separated from society (Vayikra 13:44-46 with Rashi).

Clearly, given the severity of his punishment - or more aptly, the natural consequence of his actions - the Torah is teaching us about the great and weighty power of our words. Man was endowed with the unique gift of speech at the moment of his creation, and it is this that distinguishes humanity from the beast of the field.

In regard to the creation of man, the pasuk tells us: וַיִּצֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה - *and G-d Elokim fashioned man, dust from the earth, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living being* (Bereishis 2:7). Targum Onkelos defines what 'a living being' means: וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְרוּחַ מְמַלְלָא - *and man became a speaking spirit* (ibid).

While all mammalian life forms undergo certain similar processes - respiratory, digestive, cardiac, excretory, reproductive - human beings are endowed with the Divine gift of speech. While animals can communicate with each other, only man has the sophisticated gift of speech and language.

How ironic to consider that the most elevated mark and gift of man, is also the most powerful weapon of destruction that man has. The holy Chafetz Chaim zt'l, zy'a, in his introduction to his sefer Kuntres Chovas ha'Shemirah, writes: *klal ha'devarim, bi'di'buvo shel adam, yachol li'vro'ah olamos, u'le'ha'charivan* - the summation of the matter is: with words man can create worlds, and with words, man can destroy worlds.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, teaches that "Judaism believes that words per se are the most powerful weapon G-d has provided man. Judaism believes in the power of the mind and the majesty of the word. Through the word, G-d created the world. G-d did not need words to create the world, but He chose the word as the instrument of creation in order to teach us that we can create the world through the word - and can destroy the world through the word. The word can be the most creative power in man's hands, but it can also be the most destructive power given to man. That is why Judaism is almost merciless with regard to lashon harah, evil speech, and why it takes so seriously the issues of perjury, vows and oaths.

"In Judaism, the word is the mark of one's identity as a human being, in contradistinction to a beast or brute.

Rav Soloveitchik on Tazria: The "Sin" of Giving Birth

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from *Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters* (Ktav, 2023))

Before delving into the myriad laws of the special skin condition of tzara'at, the parashah begins with a brief treatment of the tumah (ritual impurity) of a woman who has just given birth. After a waiting period of purification, she brings an olah (fire-offering) and a chatat (sin-offering) for atonement (Leviticus 12:6-7). The age-old question is what sin has she committed that requires a chatat?¹ To the contrary, has she not fulfilled the very first commandment in the Torah, to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28)? Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik cited a number of approaches before presenting his own.

One approach does not attribute it to the childbirth per se, but to an incidental sin. The Talmud says, "When a woman crouches to give birth, she bursts out and swears, 'I will never have relations with my husband again.'"² The Ramban explained that she requires atonement because she cannot fulfill such an oath, on account of her marital obligations.³

Another approach does link it to childbirth, but the sin was not committed by this particular woman. Rabbi

In medieval Hebrew, the name for man is medabber, the 'speaker,' Judaism believes in the potency of the word. It is not just a sound, it is not just phonetics - it has a mystical quality to it. Hence man's awareness of G-d must be objectified in the word. 'And they all open their mouth in holiness and purity, in song and hymn, and bless, praise, glorify, revere, sanctify and declare the kingship of G-d'" (Abraham's Journey, p.28-29).

Every day - every waking hour and moment! - we are faced with choices in the realm of our speech. Today we are no longer afflicted with nega tzara'as, and there is no physical sign of our spiritual sin. But the lessons and message of tzara'as should speak to us even today in a voice loud and clear (pun is intended). What we post, what we forward, what we 'send', what we say, and the words we speak, can bring the greatest blessings to us and others, or G-d forbid, the greatest destruction. Let us hope and pray that we are never on the giving, nor receiving, end of evil speech.

Who is the man who desires life, who loves days to see the good? The one who guards his tongue from evil, and his lips from deceit. It is he who turns away from bad and does good, it is he who seeks peace and runs after it (Tehillim 34:13-15).

Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz in his Keli Yakar said that the pain of childbirth and the menstrual cycle are the legacy of Chava's original sin. The source (מקור) of woman's travail in childbirth and of the blood afterwards would not exist had Chava not eaten the forbidden fruit. Every Jewish mother must, after having given birth, seek atonement for the vestiges of that sin. This accounts for the wording of the verse: "[the Kohen] atones for her and she becomes purified of the source of her blood (ממקור דמיה)" (Leviticus 12:7).⁴

The End Justifies the Means

In what sense, inquired the Rav, does Chava's sin persist and require continual redress? To understand this requires examining the sin itself. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge imparted knowledge. One glance at the Book of Proverbs reveals that the acquisition of wisdom is one of man's noblest pursuits. Why, then, did God prohibit Adam and Chava from eating from the tree? According to the Rav, it is because God wanted mankind to exert itself in the

pursuit knowledge. To be handed it on a silver platter, or easily ingested in prepackaged form, would be a violation of His will. The mother still aglow from pregnancy requires atonement because she lacks an appreciation of the complicated process and exertion that brought her child into the world. In this sense she has recommitted the sin of Adam and Chava, who preferred not to have to work to become wise.⁵

When we set out to achieve a goal, every step of the way is important. The effort and toil that one invests in pursuit of something is itself enriching. Not only the end but the means is of value. This critical lesson, learned from the offering a chatat, will hopefully guide the mother in raising her child.⁶

The Origins of Man

Nechama Leibowitz, a contemporary of the Rav, was one of the past generation's most outstanding teachers of Torah. She offered her own penetrating insight into the necessity of a chatat after childbirth. Midrash Yelamdenu says:

“If a woman conceives” – that is in accordance with the verse, “a man that is born of woman” (Job 14:1). [...] If you had seen from what impurity and filth he came, you would not have been able to look at him! [...] Indeed Akavia ben Mahalalel stated: Regard three things and you will not come to iniquity. Know whence you came, whither you are going, and before whom you are destined to give account and judgment....

Nechama Leibowitz argued that this Midrash drives home “the utter insignificance of man before the awe-inspiring majesty of his Maker.” The prophet Yeshayahu beheld that majesty and heard the voice proclaiming: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isaiah 6:3). What was his reaction? “Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of tamei (impure) lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of tamei (impure), lips for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).

After childbirth, the mother is teme'ah (impure) and must bring a chatat because the miracle of a child growing within her made her deeply conscious of God's greatness and her own human insignificance. She faced the stark reality that “dust, ashes, and impurity” are man's lowly origins.⁷

Enforcing Discipline

The Rav perceived another striking association between the sin of Chava and the enduring tumah that lasts weeks after childbirth detailed in Parashat Tazria. According

to the Midrash, Adam and Chava ate from the Tree of Knowledge on Friday. They could have waited a few more hours until the onset of Shabbat, at which point the fruit would have become permitted for consumption.⁸ The Rav cited an exposition of this from Likutei Torah of the Alter Rebbe, Shneur Zalman of Liady. There, he writes that as a punishment for Adam's impetuosity man must wait three years before he can eat from a newly planted tree. Women must count weeks after childbirth until they can become pure and resume physical contact with their husbands on account of Chava's lack of discipline.⁹

The Rav commented that many mitzvot teach us the importance of discipline, patience, and delayed gratification. In one of his celebrated articles, he explored Halachah's emphasis on disciplined behavior, and cited the powerful example of newlyweds suddenly forced to refrain from intimacy due to the onset of niddah:

Bride and bridegroom are young, physically strong and passionately in love with each other. Both have patiently waited for this rendezvous to take place. Just one more step and their love would have been fulfilled, a vision realized. Suddenly the bride and the groom make a movement of recoil.¹⁰

The bride and groom must now wait almost two weeks before they may have physical contact again. The Rav goes on to valorize the withdrawal:

The heroic act did not take place in the presence of jubilating crowds; no bards will sing of these two modest, humble people. It happened in the sheltered privacy of their home, in the stillness of the night. [...]

This kind of divine dialectical discipline is not limited to man's sexual life, but extends to all areas of natural drive and temptation. The hungry person must forego the pleasure of taking food, no matter how strong the temptation; men of property must forego the pleasure of acquisition, if the latter is halachically and morally wrong. In a word, Halachah requires of man that he possess the capability of withdrawal.¹¹

Exploring the Rav's Insight

The Rav posited that the process of working towards a goal has inestimable value. Not only did the Rav appreciate the toilsome process for acquiring Torah, ameilut ba-Torah, but he lived it.¹² The following anecdote, told by the Rav's eminent student Rabbi Mordechai Feuerstein, is emblematic of a lifetime of indefatigable striving and absolute dedication in Torah study:

One evening during my college years, I accompanied my father who had some documents to deliver to the Rav at his 10 Hancock Road address in Brookline. As prearranged, at 10PM we rang the doorbell, and Rebbetzin Soloveitchik answered

the door. My father explained that the Rav had requested the documents we had brought. Mrs. Soloveitchik seemed very subdued and serious... She expressed her regrets and plaintively explained, "He hasn't left his desk all day. Not even to eat or drink. He came home from the minyan this morning and said he was troubled by a difficult Rashi. He went into his study fourteen hours ago and still hasn't come out." The envelope was left in her keeping and we walked to the car in utter silence, with a heightened conception of *ameilut ba-Torah*.¹³

1. See Abarbanel ad loc.
2. Niddah 31b.
3. Ramban on Leviticus 12:7.
4. Keli Yakar on Leviticus 12:2.
5. Chumash Mesoras Harav, 3:77–78.
6. See further Parashat Bereshit, "Growth Rings of the Fruit Tree."

Rectifying the Flaw of Impatience

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Parshas Tazria begins with the law of *טומאת יולדת* – the status of impurity that befalls a woman after childbirth. She is rendered *טמאה* (impure) for one week after the birth of a boy, and two weeks after the birth of a girl. After this period, she remains forbidden from entering the Beis Ha'mikdash or eating *korbanos* for another 33 days in the case of the birth of a boy, and 66 days if she had given birth to a girl. She must then offer a pair of sacrifices, one of which is a *חטאת* (sin-offering).

The question naturally arises as to why a woman must bring a *חטאת* after giving birth. She had just done the greatest of all acts – bringing another human life into the world, and she needed to go through a difficult nine-month period of pregnancy followed by the excruciating pain of labor in order to do so. For what could she possibly require atonement after delivering a baby?

The Gemara (Nidda 31b), as cited by the Ramban, explains that a woman in labor suffers so terribly that she vows to separate from her husband in order that she will never need to endure this pain again. Later, of course, when she holds a beautiful baby in her arms, she regrets having made such a vow, and so she brings a *חטאת* to atone for having promised to never be intimate with her husband again.

The Keli Yakar explains differently, associating this *korban* with the sin of Adam and Chava in Gan Eden. Chava was punished with the curse of *בניית בנים* (Bereishis 3:16), that women forever more would endure pain during childbirth. Appropriately, then, after this experience, a woman brings a sacrifice to help atone for Chava's misdeed

7. Leibowitz, Studies in Vayikra, 105–107. When reading this insight, it struck me that it was articulated by a woman who, sadly, was not blessed herself to give birth to a child. It was reported by a close student of hers that "all of her achievements notwithstanding, the childless Leibowitz confided that she would have given it all up to have children" (Yael Unterman, "Nehama Leibowitz," <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/leibowitz-nehama> [accessed July 12, 2021]).
8. Leviticus Rabbah, 25:2.
9. Chumash Mesoras Harav, 3:77–78.
10. Soloveitchik, "Catharsis," 45.
11. Ibid., 46.
12. See, e.g., Rashi on Leviticus 26:3 (quoting Torat Kohanim, *parsheta* 1:2), that the Torah requires its study to be accomplished through exertion.
13. Eleff, *Mentor of Generations*, 264.

which caused her to experience such unbearable agony.

Rav Soloveitchik develops this idea further, citing a tradition (Vayikra Rabba 25:2; Likutei Torah, Parshas Kedoshim) that God had intended to make the forbidden tree in Gan Eden permissible. The command to abstain from the *עץ הדעת* (tree of knowledge) was given right after Adam and Chava were created, on Friday, and it was meant to be only temporary. With the onset of Shabbos, Adam and Chava were to be allowed to partake of this tree's fruit. Their flaw, then, was impatience, the unwillingness to wait just a little longer to enjoy the enticing fruit. For this reason, Chazal pointed to the mitzva of *orla*, which forbids partaking of a tree's produce for the first three years after it is planted, as a means of rectifying Adam and Chava's mistake. We correct this flaw of impatience by waiting for three years before enjoying the literal fruits of our labor, abstaining for three years from the luscious fruits produced by the tree we've worked hard to plant and tend to.

Similarly, Rav Soloveitchik explained, the Torah imposed upon a woman a lengthy period of *tum'a* (impurity) after childbirth in order to engender the quality of patience, thereby rectifying Chava's sin. Chava erred by refusing to patiently wait for the fruit to become permissible – and women therefore correct this ill by patiently waiting to regain their status of purity after delivering a child. The Torah here seeks to teach us about the importance of exercising patience and discipline, of being able to restrain ourselves and wait, without insisting on obtaining everything we want instantaneously.

Important Lessons to Learn from the Ancient Biblical Malady, Tzara'at

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week's parasha, parashat Tazria, focuses on the ancient Biblical disease *צָרַעַת*—Tzara'at that, according to the biblical commentators, would afflict those who spoke *לְשׁוֹן הָרָע*—l'shon harah, evil, about others.

The possibility that a social or ethical violation could be the cause of a dermatological disease, seems rather absurd to most contemporary observers. Yet, in some of our previous analyses we have attempted to expound on the wisdom that is to be found in the rituals and meanings that are associated with this ancient disease. On this occasion, however, we wish to share with you some important lessons that may be gleaned from the nuances of the Biblical texts that are found in parashat Tazria.

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter points out the intriguing juxtaposition of parashat Tazria with the previous parasha, parashat Shemini. He notes that the Torah in parashat Shemini lists the various species of animals and birds that are permitted and forbidden to be eaten. Immediately following the list of forbidden foods, is the portion that deals with Tzara'at, the disease that afflicts those who speak l'shon hara (evil). Rabbi Salanter notes that, unfortunately, most people are far more concerned about eating forbidden foods and animals that were not properly slaughtered, than they are about “eating” human beings alive by speaking l'shon hara about them. Declares Rabbi Salanter, that is why parashat Tazria follows parashat Shemini, to teach that “eating a human being” is to be regarded with no less severity than eating a forbidden worm!

In Leviticus 13:3, the Torah instructs the Kohen (priest), *וַיִּרְאֶה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הַבְּמִיּוֹת*, to look at the mark on the skin of the flesh, and determine whether it is indeed the disease Tzara'at or a general blemish. The Mishnah in Negaim 2:5 states: *כָּל הַבְּמִיּוֹת אֲדָם רוֹאֶה, חוּץ מִנְגַּעַי עִצְמוֹ*, A person can inspect all afflictions, except his own. Our rabbis explain that most people are able to quickly discern the shortcomings and failures of others, but find it exceedingly difficult to see their own shortcomings. This is why the Torah requires that an impartial person (a Kohen) must come to inspect a suspected blemish. We see, all too often, that people who are mean, who anger easily, who are not charitable, who accuse others of having these very same defects, are usually totally oblivious to their own shortcomings. That is why every person needs his/her own

Kohen—a mentor or a friend, who is not afraid to tell him/her what their own personal shortcomings may be.

In Leviticus 13:3, the verse concludes with the words: *וַיִּרְאֶה הַכֹּהֵן, וְטָמֵא אֹתוֹ, and the Kohen shall look at it [the blemish] and declare him contaminated.* The obvious question is why is the phrase and the “Kohen shall see” repeated both at the beginning of the verse and at its conclusion? Rabbi Y.Y. Trunk of Kutna, (cited in Itturei Torah) is said to have responded to this unusual sentence structure by stating that we should learn from the dual repetition that when we seek to evaluate a person, we should not only look at their shortcomings, at the place of their affliction, but rather look at the whole person, and make a special effort to search for, and inspect each person's good qualities. That is why it says that the Kohen will “look” at the affliction, and then “see”—the entire person.

While it is often easy to focus on people's frailties, it is usually helpful to place the negatives in context—by looking at the whole picture of the whole person. One may discover that in the overall picture, the good qualities of a person often outweigh the negatives. Consequently, those who truly desire to help their neighbors will always try to put those failings in context because of the overwhelming good that can be found in that same person.

In Leviticus 13:3, we learn that after the Kohen's first inspection, he may be unable to discern for certain whether the blemish is truly the disease Tzara'at. In such ambiguous cases we are told that the afflicted person is put in quarantine for seven days. In Leviticus 13:6, we learn that after the seven day incubation period the Kohen looks at the blemish again. If the Kohen sees that the blemish has dimmed and has not spread on the skin, he declares him *טָהוֹר*—“tahor”—pure—it is a skin disease of some sort, but not Tzara'at. The afflicted person then immerses himself and his garments and is considered pure.

Our rabbis teach that there are two ways of looking at an affliction that has not spread. One may proclaim that the fact that the blemish has not completely healed clearly indicates that the disease is still present. On the other hand, one may look at the infection and say, the fact that it has not spread is a positive sign—obviously the blemish is in the process of healing. While both these assessments are objectively truthful and not exaggerations, each person sees the affliction from their own perspective. The Torah,

in effect, proclaims that the Kohen, who should be a person of sensitivity and compassion, is to regard the fact of not spreading as a positive sign, and declare the infected person clean.

Rabbi Simcha Bunam used to cite the verse in Song of Songs 1:4, *קָרַבְתִּי אֲחֵרֶיךָ נְרוּצָה*, *draw me, and I will run after you*. Citing the Talmud in Kiddushin 22b, Reb Bunim noted that there are two ways to attract a living animal. One way is to call after, and beckon the animal, the other is to hit it with a stick so that it runs ahead. Says Rav Bunim, G-d also has two ways to attract the Jewish people to Him:

Don't Bad-Mouth Yourself

Rabbi Johnny Solomon

Last night I had a spiritual coaching session with a client who is highly self-critical and who often talks herself down. And when this fact arose in our conversation, I explained to her that what she was doing was speaking Lashon HaRa about herself, and that just as the Torah teaches us that we should not speak Lashon HaRa about others, so too, we should not speak Lashon HaRa about ourselves.

Significantly, the topic of Lashon HaRa is very timely as Parshat Tazria details the laws of Tzora'at which, we are told (Arachin 15b), comes upon a person for a range of reasons including the fact that they have spoken Lashon HaRa.

Admittedly, when we address the laws of Lashon HaRa, we generally assume that this refers to someone speaking badly about another. However, as both the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Igrot Kodesh 6:1621) and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Mesorat Moshe Vol. 1 p. 499) explain, just as we may not speak Lashon HaRa about others, so too, we may not speak Lashon HaRa about ourselves.

But what is wrong with speaking Lashon HaRa about ourselves?

According to Rabbeinu Yonah (Sha'arei Teshuvah 3:222), those who speak or hear Lashon HaRa about

through afflictions or by calling out to them in love so that they respond in repentance (Mayana Shel Torah, by Alexander Zusha Friedman, p. 73.)

We pray that the Jewish people will hear G-d's call and respond to His beckoning of love, so that we need not be afflicted, and that our lives will be enriched by the message of His Torah. May we all, diligently, study His message so that we can transmit it to the entire world, and that very soon all humankind will respond positively to G-d's loving call.

others develop feelings of contempt and hatred towards them. As a result, this then brings them to transgress the prohibition of hating others (see Vayikra 19:16). Applying this to ourselves, if we speak Lashon HaRa about ourselves, we are then likely to develop feelings of contempt and hatred towards ourselves.

But this itself is forbidden! Because while we are commanded to love others, we are also commanded to love ourselves (ibid. 19:18). Accordingly, it is wrong to speak Lashon HaRa about yourself because it will lead you to love yourself less and maybe, God forbid, even hate yourself.

Significantly, Parshat Tazria begins by speaking about the birth of children, and when a child is born, we focus on their tenderness, and hope and pray that they will grow up without experiencing hardship and without being on the receiving-end of unkind words.

Yet as we get older, not only are we all occasionally victims of Lashon HaRa from others, but we ourselves overlook our own tenderness and frequently become the ones who speak the worst Lashon HaRa about ourselves.

Overall, if we wish to be more careful about Lashon HaRa, then we should start with being careful about how we speak to ourselves.

Looking Ahead

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

The opening of Parshat Tazria, which details the laws governing purity and impurity following childbirth, focuses primarily on halakhic technicalities. Yet the Torah's mention of childbirth gives

our Sages a unique opportunity to marvel at the wonder of bringing children into the world. In Vayikra Rabbah, the Sages voice their amazement at the miraculousness with which mothers can carry a pregnancy and create

new life. Rabbi Levi said: The way of the world is that if a person deposits a purse of silver in private and [the other individual] returns a litra of gold in public, does he not feel a debt of gratitude toward him? So it is with the Holy One blessed be He: people deposit a putrid drop in private and the Holy One blessed be He returns completed, high quality human beings in public. Is this not worthy of praise? That is, “I will project my opinion afar, and I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.” (Job 36:3) (Vayikra Rabbah 14:2) Rabbi Levi takes as his point of departure the words of Job, who ‘looks off into the distance,’ reflecting on what the future holds. Here, it is the birth of a child that calls for forward thinking, holding onto hope that what begins as an embryo will successfully grow into a healthy baby to be born at the proper time, and the fulfillment of that hope gives us reason to praise the Almighty. It is only by Divine grace that this long, at times agonizing process of human fertility can bring about a child, and it is in this Divine wonder that we place our hope. And it is no different once a child is born. At a Brit Milah, a mitzva similarly discussed in Tazria, the traditional liturgy declares our hope that zeh hakatan gadol yihyeh, ‘this small child shall yet be great.’ For all our children, we hope from the moment they are born that, at times against all odds, they will persevere through the challenges that will come their way, transform the world around them, as we look off hopefully into the distance to a better tomorrow than the world of today. If ever these were the feelings held in parents’ hearts, they are all the

more amplified in the hearts and minds of every new Israeli parent and grandparent. Think of all the babies born in Israel since October 7th – approximately 90,000, based on the most recent official data. What a world they’ve been born into: a period marked by crisis and tragedy, of lives lost, innocents held hostage, communities in ruin, and a nation simultaneously grieving and fearful yet fiercely showing courage and resolve.

With what hope can these children, many of whom bear names such as Nova, Be’eri, and Oz in commemoration of the massacres of Simchat Torah, be raised under these challenging circumstances? What will Simchat Torah look like when they enter the portals of the synagogue and then the portals of the IDF? Yet the Torah teaches us not to get locked into any particular moment, but rather to look onwards to what lies ahead. We are charged not to lose hope in our mission, to believe that we can still build a society and a world in which our children will thrive, and one that they, too, will take part in building. R. Levi, the famous Amoraic aggadist, uses this verse from Job to remind Jewish parents throughout the ages to look off into the future and prepare our children for the bringing of the Messianic era. It is the same R. Levi who reminds us of our responsibility to dream for a bright future, confident that, with God’s help, there will be better days down the road, and that our dreams will eventually be fulfilled (Berakhot 55b). All these little ones will grow, and with them our people and our world will find ways to heal.

Tzoraas and the Kohen

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

אָדָם כִּי יִהְיֶה בְעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ... לִנְגַע צָרַעַת וְהוּבָא אֶל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל אֶחָד מִבְּנָיֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים

If a person will on the skin of his flesh... an affliction of tzoraas, he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons the kohanim. (13:2)

Why is the treatment of tzoraas, a matter that is ostensibly medical in nature, entrusted to the kohanim?

The straightforward answer, says Meshech Chochmah, is that since the condition of tzoraas and the recovery therefrom involves bringing the person from a state of tumah to taharah (purity and impurity), it lies in the domain of the Kohen. Indeed, the Gemara (Zevachim 14b) associates tzoraas in this regard with the procedure

of parah adumah (red heifer), which is also entrusted to the Kohen, even though it is technically not a korban, nor are its procedures done in the Beis Hamikdash. Nevertheless, since the parah adumah is instrumental in allowing a person to go from a state of tumah to taharah, it is performed by the Kohen. The same is true for tzoraas.

On a deeper level, the Meshech Chochmah explains that although tzoraas befalls a person on account of his wrongdoings, it is nonetheless also a contagious disease. Thus, we find that the sages of the Talmud would take care to avoid enclaves where people with tzoraas were situated.¹ Indeed, on a basic level, this is what is behind the Torah’s instruction that the metzora announce that he is tamei as he is leaving the city,² in order to warn people to keep their distance so that they not catch his tzoraas.

In light of this, we will appreciate that whoever treats the metzora is effectively exposing himself to danger of contracting tzoraas, and will thus be in need of special protection to avoid this occurring. It is for this reason the Torah places the metzora's treatment in the domain of the kohanim, for, having been separated from the rest of the people to enter Hashem's domain,³ they are subject to a higher level of Divine supervision, and will thus

Haftarat Tazria: Sanctified Soil

Rabbi Michoel Zylberman (From *From Within the Tent: The Haftarat, Essays on the Weekly Haftarah from the Rabbis and Professors of Yeshiva University*, YU Press, 2011)

After experiencing his miraculous cure from tzara'at in the waters of the Yarden, Na'aman takes leave of the prophet Elisha to return to his native Aram. He professes absolute belief in Hashem, renouncing his previous idolatrous ways and thus accepting upon himself the status of a geir toshav (see Gittin 57b), and asking forgiveness in advance for future forced participation in the pagan rites of his land. At the same time, while Elisha emphatically rejects Na'aman's attempts to shower gifts upon him, Na'aman asks permission of Elisha to return to Aram with two mule loads worth of earth.

As the text strongly implies, the commentators (Rashi, Radak) explain that Na'aman wished to take earth from Eretz Yisrael for use in building a mizbeach to Hashem in Aram. This brings to mind a later historical event, namely the construction of the synagogue of Shaf Ve-Yativ in Nahardea during the Babylonian exile. According to Rashi (Megillah 29a s.v. de-shaf), this synagogue was constructed by the exiles who left Eretz Yisrael together with Yechaniah, King of Yehudah, with stones and earth that they brought with them from Eretz Yisrael. Rashi writes that this was a fulfillment of the pasuk in Tehillim, "ki ratzu avadekha et avaneha ve-et afarah yechoneinu" – "For your servants hold her stones dear and they cherish her dust" (102:15).

Na'aman's request appears to presuppose that earth taken from Eretz Yisrael would retain its unique status even when brought to Chutz La-Aretz. This is actually the subject of a dispute among halakhic authorities. Mishneh La-Melekh (commentary to Rambam Hilkhhot Bikurim 2:9 s.v. ve-da) presumes, in the context of agricultural laws applicable in Eretz Yisrael, that soil from Chutz La-Aretz arriving in Eretz Yisrael on a boat attains the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael. Similarly, earth originating in Eretz Yisrael loses its sanctity upon reaching foreign territory. This

be vouchsafed from harm in their interaction with the metzora.

1. See Kesuvos 77b and Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 16:3
2. See pasuk 45
3. As the pasuk states (Divrei Hayamim I, 23:13) ויבדל אהרן להקדישו קודש קדשים, He (Hashem) separated Aharon to sanctify him as holy of holies.

follows the simple reading of the mishnah (Challah 2:2), that rules that soil from Chutz La-Aretz arriving in Eretz Yisrael on a boat is obligated in terumot and subject to the laws of shemittah.

Mikdash David (Zeraim, Terumot, 45:1) takes the opposite position, based on a passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Challah 4:4). The Yerushalmi indicates that if the Jordan River overflows into Syrian territory and deposits earth from Eretz Yisrael in Syria, then that earth has the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael as far as the laws of terumot and shemittah. Once the earth of Eretz Yisrael has been sanctified, that status cannot be removed by relocating the earth to Chutz La-Aretz. Mikdash David notes that in the opposite case, foreign soil brought into Eretz Yisrael may still attain a sanctified status in the same way that, according to one opinion, foreign lands could be conquered and given the halakhic status of Eretz Yisrael (based on Yerushalmi Challah 2:1).

The Mikdash David's approach, which provides insight into Na'aman's request, also sheds light on a practice recorded by Rema in Hilkhhot Aveilut (Yoreh De'ah 363:1). Rama, based on Ohr Zarua (Aveilut 419), cites a custom of placing earth from Eretz Yisrael in a grave at the time of burial. R. Avraham Malkho (Shulchan Gavoa, Yoreh De'ah 363:10), writing in early eighteenth century Greece, observes that in his time and place (Salonica) they tried to obtain earth from Tzefat and the Upper Galil. In more recent times, R. Yechiel Michel Tuksinski (Gesher Ha-Chaim vol. I 27:10) notes the practice of taking soil specifically from Har Ha-Zeitim.

While Chazal extol the virtue of burial in Eretz Yisrael, the significance of using a small quantity of soil from Eretz Yisrael in a grave in Chutz La-Aretz is not readily apparent. The gemara in Ketubot (111a) indicates that those that are buried in Eretz Yisrael will be immediately resurrected

at the time of *Techiyat Ha-Meitim*. The *gemara* initially entertains the position that those who are buried in *Chutz La-Aretz* will not be resurrected at all, but eventually concludes that their bones will roll all the way to *Eretz Yisrael*, and the *tzadikim* will benefit from protective tunnels for that purpose. *Radvaz* (*Teshuvot* 1:484) writes that bodies decompose more quickly in the soil of *Eretz Yisrael*, as indicated by the *pasuk* “*eretz ochelet yoshveha hi*” – “it is a land that consumes its inhabitants” (*Bemidbar* 13:32). As opposed to the negative implications intended by the *meragelim* who spoke these words, faster decomposition of a body is for the benefit of the deceased (see also *Divrei Sofrim* 363:16). However, neither the easing of tribulations associated with *Techiyat Ha-Meitim*, nor the more rapid decomposition of the body, would seem to be achieved by burial in *Chutz La-Aretz* with a minimal amount of earth from *Eretz Yisrael*.

R. Yechiel Michel Tuksinski (*Gesher Ha-Chaim* vol. 1 27:10) suggests that even if soil removed from *Eretz Yisrael* does not retain its *kedushah*, it still has a connection to *Eretz Yisrael*. That connection, either because of its inherent status, or because of its symbolic meaning, may still serve the purpose of easing the tribulations of *Techiyat Ha-Meitim*. *Shulchan Gavoa’h* (*ibid.*, 363:11) writes that burial in *Chutz La-Aretz* with a small amount of soil from *Eretz Yisrael* simply demonstrates *chibat ha-aretz*, love of the land.

This argument notwithstanding, R. Tuksinski concedes that the value of burying with earth from *Eretz Yisrael* is more readily understood if that soil retains the *kedushah* of *Eretz Yisrael*. The *gemara* in *Ketubot* (111a, cited in *Shach*, *Yoreh De’ah* 163:3, see also *Tanchuma Ha’azinu* 6) states that one who is buried in *Eretz Yisrael* is considered as if he is buried under the *mizbeach*, in fulfillment of the verse, “*ve-khiper admato amo*” (*Devarim* 32:43) – namely, that the land assists us in achieving atonement. *Sedei Chemed* (vol. 5 *Ma’arekhet Eretz Yisrael* 1:8) writes that this goal can be achieved with a minimal amount of earth, and even if the earth is exported to *Chutz La-Aretz*. Similarly, *Shulchan Gavoa’h* writes that if one uses a significant amount of soil from *Eretz Yisrael*, covering the whole body, that may achieve the objective of speeding up the body’s decomposition.

The *Ba’al Ha-Turim* (*Shemot* 28:7, *ad loc.*) writes that as a reward for *Na’aman’s* request of soil from *Eretz Yisrael* he merited descendants who learned *Torah*. Our analysis of his petition demonstrates that the request itself touches on halakhic issues that contribute to our own *talmud Torah*.