

LAMPLIGHTER

29 Adar Beis
Parshas Tazria
Parshas Hachodesh

1394

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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

This week's Torah portion, Tazria, deals with the laws pertaining to man - matters of ritual impurity and how to purify oneself after becoming impure. A discussion of these laws follows the discussion in previous chapters pertaining to the purity, impurity and sacrificial aspects of animals.

"The same way that man's creation took place after all the other animals and birds, so are the laws pertaining to man to be found in the Torah after the laws dealing with animals," our Sages teach.

The Talmud and Midrash offer several explanations as to why man was created only after every other creation was complete. One of them is so that man would arrive in a world ready and completed, and be immediately able to perform mitzvot (commandments). A second reason given is that if man's behavior is not worthy and proper, one can say to him, "Even a mosquito was created before you, even an earthworm preceded you."

These two explanations express the dual nature of the essence of man. The first presents man in the role of the crown of Creation, for whom G-d prepared everything in advance. The second explanation stresses the relative unimportance of man as compared to all the other animals, to the point that even the mosquito came first.

The first reason stresses man's merit and is related to the soul of every Jew. The second explanation, stressing the unimportance of man, relates to the physical body.

By virtue of the G-dly soul, which is literally a part of G-d, man stands on a level higher than all other creations. This aspect of man cannot be changed even if, G-d forbid, he sins. However, because of his physical body, man is concurrently lower than even a mosquito; an animal does not have free choice, and can only carry out the function for which it was created. Man is the only creature that can choose not to carry out G-d's will.

Because man has the ability to lower himself below all other animals, the laws pertaining to him are written in the Torah only after the laws pertaining to animals.

This contradiction in man's nature raises the

When Was Your Last Spiritual?

By Yossy Goldman

In this week's Torah reading we read all about the kohen examining people to determine whether they were afflicted by tzaraat, the leprous curse. It was a physical inspection which had spiritual implications. The person might be pronounced tahor (pure) or, G-d forbid, tamei (impure), all depending on the results of the kohen's examination.

I couldn't help thinking about going to the doctor for the requisite annual medical examination, or "physical." We go through the routine checkup—height, weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, and stress tests on the treadmill and up and down the little staircase.

But have you ever thought of going for a "spiritual"?

What's our "height"? Do we walk tall? Are we proud and upright Jews, or are we apologetically stooped and bent over by the burden of an inferiority complex?

What about our "weight"? Are we on a well-balanced diet of Torah, the sustenance of our souls, or do we suffer from spiritual malnutrition?

And how is our heart doing? A Jewish heart doesn't only pump blood; it pumps warmth and love. A healthy Jewish heart is the emotional center of the person. It emotes and feels the pain of another. Healthy hearts are inspired by events that point unmistakably to the hand of G-d in the world. If we aren't feeling what we should be, then we might be suffering from blocked arteries.

When the doctor took my blood pressure, I immediately made the obvious connection—tefillin. I remembered the story of the simple farmer who went for his first medical checkup. When the doctor checked his pressure, he asked what it was all about. The doctor explained patiently that he was checking his heart rate. "But why are you holding my arm if you want to see how my heart is?" "When I check your hand," replied the physician, "I know how your heart is." The hand that gives charity, for example, indicates that it's connected to a healthy Jewish heart.

Then came the stress test—up the stairs and down the stairs, up again and down again, and again and again. How do we handle the ups and downs of life? Are we smug and arrogant when we're up, and dejected and depressed when we're down? How do we deal with stress? Do we trust in G-d that everything has a purpose, and a positive one at that? Or do we become angry and bitter at life's unkind twists of fate?

Finally, there was the treadmill. I really dislike treadmills. After two minutes, I said to the nurse I'd had enough. "The doctor said you must do four minutes," she informed me sternly. "Four minutes?" I cried. "This feels like four hours!"

Life can be a tedious treadmill. We find ourselves running and running and getting nowhere fast. A grueling rat race, where even if you win you're still a rat—all of it leaves us wondering what it's all about and why we are working so hard with no meaningful, consequential reward.

So this year, in addition to going for a physical, why not go for a spiritual? Find a kohen, a Jewish spiritual teacher/healer, who can search your soul for its healthy characteristics as well as your necessary growth points, and prescribe a spiritual fitness program tailored for you and your neshamah. May we all be healthy, physically and spiritually.

Slice of LIFE

Just One Prayer

By Sara Debbie Gutfreund

We're walking towards the Western Wall, the Kotel, as the first stars appear. They blink hesitantly in the aftermath of a furious red sunset that has painted the darkening sky with streaks of red that fade to orange and then to baby pink, melting without warning into the encroaching darkness. I'm pushing a baby stroller along the uneven stones as my children reluctantly walk beside me.

"We're tired," They complain.

But don't you want to pray at the Kotel?" I ask, a tiny sliver of guilt inching its way towards my heart. I want to pray at the Kotel. No, I need to pray at the Kotel. I desperately need to pray. Not because there is anything awful happening in my life. Not because I need to ask for something specific, but my soul is parched. My hands long to touch the ancient stones. My eyes ache to see that slice of sky that rises above the Wall, carrying millions of prayers beyond the edge of this world. My children's whining continues as we make our way down the narrow street leading towards the Kotel. The shadows play with our echoing steps, which weave their way into my children's voices as I try to convince them to cooperate.

"Maybe you want to write a note to G-d?" I ask them. My beautiful, Jerusalem born children look up at me with surprised eyes. Despite our many trips to the Kotel, they had never thought of doing this. Maybe they thought that it was a practice reserved for tourists. But I see the idea flicker through their minds as they walk a little faster.

"Will G-d really read it?" "Do you have paper and pens?" We are all walking faster now. The baby begins to whimper. I find his pacifier without missing a step. I feel like there is a wall of resistance blocking me from prayer, and somehow I think that if I walk faster then I will break through.

But when we actually arrive at the Kotel, I am suddenly reluctant to begin. It has been so long since I really prayed. So very long. I busy myself with finding papers and pens and coins for charity. I glance at the crowd of women around us. Each one so

different. Some of them are praying. Some of them are sitting and gazing at the Wall. Some of them are rummaging in their bags for...something. There are young mothers with baby carriages. Women in skirts, in pants, in scarves and bare headed. Women with wrinkles etched upon their upturned faces. Young girls with eyes lost in prayer books. The sound of a child's laughter loses itself in a woman's lonely, aching sobs.

"Mommy, why aren't you praying?" my daughter asks me. I look at the baby, now peacefully sucking his pacifier. I watch my other children clutching their sheets of paper, writing their notes to their Creator. Why am I suddenly afraid to pray?

I walk towards the Wall, each step unblocks another wall around my soul. I lay my head upon the hard, cold stones. The tears come so fast. They fall without warning. They fall without reason. I find myself closing my prayer book and whispering my own prayer into the spaces between the stones. I feel like an exhausted child as my words fall into each other.

Please G-d, help me. I am so tired, so exhausted from ordinary life. I stare down at the angelic face of my newborn baby. I have been up for what feels like months and months without more than two hours of sleep. I feel drained of the inspiration that usually graces my life, as if my purpose in life has suddenly shrunk and folded in on itself. Like I will never be myself again. But you can give me back my passion for Your Land, for Your Torah, for Your children. You can give me the strength to keep driving even when all my tanks are empty. Please help me strive and climb again. Please show me how to pray even when I feel like I am speaking to myself. Because I know that I'm not. I know that You hear me. I know how You wait for my prayers, for my reaching. Show me how to reach again. Show me again how to be extraordinary in my own life, in my own home.

I wipe the remaining tears from my cheeks. It is getting late. I hope that my children won't be too tired to walk back to the car. I signal to them that it's time to go, but they don't want to leave.

"I haven't been able to pray yet." One insists.

"And I haven't finished my note..." But we somehow make it back to the car through the meandering, narrow streets. I try to hold onto my prayer, as the ordinary noise of life pulls me back into its whirl. But it fades slowly away, like the stars that disappear in the sky at dawn, winking at me

from the window of the nursery. The night has been long, the sheer bliss of feeding and holding my baby struggling with my overwhelming exhaustion. By breakfast time, I am in a bit of a daze, winding my way through bowls of cereal and lunch sandwiches, the spilled Cheerios crunching beneath my feet. The day stretches impossibly before me. I try to conjure up the image of the Kotel stones cradling my weary head, but I can't quite get there. I try to get back to that place within me that still reaches unceasingly for meaning. I can't get back. As I kiss my children goodbye by the door, the glare of the morning sun is sharp and unforgiving. I want to climb, to run, to inspire. But the heaviness tugs at me, warning me to pause, to rest, to give up. And then I spot it. A crumpled up note in the bottom of the stroller beside the couch. Tentatively I open the paper, my heart instantly warmed by my daughter's lovely, tiny letters curling across the page.

"Hashem, You give me so much. Thank You for the food, the home, my parents, my brothers and sisters. Thank you for all the blessings that You always give me, all day and all night. Thank You for always taking care of me. And I just want to ask You for one thing that is very close to my heart..."

And that is where the note ends. What is the one thing that my daughter wants? How does she have such deep wisdom, such a mature ability to express gratitude at such a young age? And then I realize that I need to say thank You too. For the beautiful children and the newborn gift. For my marriage blessed with peace and growth. For the opportunity to live in this sacred Land and for all the tiny, huge blessings that arch across my days. The ability to see, to walk, to hear, to nurture, to smile...And then I know what my one request would be at the end of the note, at the end of a sleepless night, at the end of my thoughts, I ask for one prayer.

If You give me the words, if You give me the strength in my heart, if You return to me a spark of the purity of my soul on this ordinary weekday morning, then I will have one prayer. One line of connection to You, to myself, to the ultimate purpose of my life. And that is all I need. One prayer. And suddenly I am almost back there. The cold stones cradling my worn out soul, the slice of sky beckoning to my weary heart, the space between the stones that swallows my prayer and pours it into the sky, transforming ordinary words into precious jewels of eternity.

One prayer.

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INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

“Everything that the Merciful One does is done for good” & “This too is for the good”

This letter was sent to R. Yisrael Yacobovitz, the Chief Rabbi of Dublin, Ireland, and R. Zalman Yosef Aloni, the Rabbinic judge of the city.

18 Menachem Av, 5711,
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Greetings and blessings,

I received your letter of the Tuesday of Parshas Pinchas....

I will conclude with statements that I made following Shabbos Nachamu concerning our Sages' statement that G-d will comfort the Jews in a twofold manner. It will be twofold: not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively. Implied is that the comfort will be given in such a manner that not only will the pain be removed, but the pain itself will be transformed into pleasure. The person will see, even with his eyes of flesh, that the difficulties he suffered until now: a) came for a reason — this realization cannot be called twofold comfort, this is only ordinary comforting; the concept of twofold comfort that the prophet adds implies that b) one sees that the suffering itself was not really suffering, but rather the outpouring of hidden goodness. It is only because of the abundance of this goodness that it is drawn down to the physical plane in such a manner, as explained in brief in Tanya, ch. 26. As the Gemara relates, there is an adage that “Everything that the Merciful One does is done for the good.” And there is an even loftier adage than this: “This too is for the good.” The difference between these two adages is reflected in the difference between the story involving Rabbi Akiva and that involving Nachum Ish Gamzu. In Rabbi Akiva's instance, his candle was extinguished and his rooster and donkey were devoured. As a result, he was saved from physical harm. Thus it was possible to see that through the anguish that he suffered, good came about. Nevertheless, the event itself involved anguish. This can be seen as ordinary comforting.

In contrast, in the story of Nachum Ish Gamzu, when the jewels and pearls were exchanged for earth, a miracle took place with the earth itself. It was not only that [as in Rabbi Akiva's instance,] through the travail he was saved from harm. On the contrary, it became apparent for him that [the earth] was not a source of travail, but a source of great goodness.

May it be G-d's will that in the present situation as well, it will be revealed not only that “Everything that the Merciful One does is done for the good,” but that “This too is for the good”; that every element of existence can reveal the inner intent. Then it will be apparent that “This too is for the good.” It is only that, at present, this cannot be seen by eyes of flesh, because this good is from the hidden realm that is loftier than the revealed realm.”

With blessings for success in your holy work, from one who awaits the mercies of Heaven and good tidings of a general and individual nature,

QUESTIONS FOR THE RABBI

Ancient Dress

By Tzvi Freeman

Question: Why do the chassidim dress in the manner of 18th century Russian non-Jewish gentry?

Answer: The dress code is just a classic social psychology issue. For a community to stick together they need some distinct dress. It's actually written into the Code of Jewish Law that a Jew is supposed to dress differently from those around him. Every once in a while in history, for whatever reason, that falls apart—and then starts up again. So the dress gets fixed at that “healing of crisis” point.

Now, if you'll allow me to make a small comment: I notice you are asking questions about very external matters—the things you see, but don't really count. Proof that it's external: A person can wear all the right clothes, and be sinking terribly on the inside.

But don't you have any questions on what these people believe? What drives them? Why are they still around? I mean, about the engine under the hood.

A WORD

from the Director

In this week's Parsha we learn of a leprousy-like disease. This disease afflicted a person, or his home or other possessions, when he indulged in slander.

When a person discovered that he suffered from this malady, he realized without a shadow of a doubt that there was an omniscient G-d who had been witness to his sin. The person was then required to shut himself off for seven days, in seclusion from the rest of society. These seven days were spent in introspection and consultation with the priest on how to atone for his transgression.

Speaking unfavorably about another shows a complete lack of "ahavat Yisrael"-love of one's fellow like oneself. Just as we certainly don't want others to notice or talk about our failings and foibles, we shouldn't talk about other people's faults.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that when you see a fault in another person, that same fault most definitely appears—even if only in a minute amount—in you. For, just as you cannot recognize a person whom you never met, you cannot “recognize” a fault you do not have.

There is another teaching attributed to the Baal Shem Tov about slander and gossip. When you hear an uncomplimentary report about another person, even if you don't know that other person, you should be very deeply pained.

It can only be one of two things: if what is being said about the individual is true, then he is flawed and in need of improvement; if however, it is not true, then slander is being spoken, and the talebearer is being harmful not only to the other person, but to himself as well.

J. I. Gutnick

IT HAPPENED *Once...*

The Ruin in the Forest

By Yitzchak Buxbaum

In 1759, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov sent one of his young disciples, Rabbi Moshe Meshel, with a letter to his former opponent and now disciple, the great scholar Rabbi Chaim Rapaport, rabbi of the city of Lvov.

The letter instructed Rabbi Chaim that on a certain Wednesday in the summer month of Tammuz, he should travel to a designated place in the forest outside the city and study there, in depth, the first four chapters of the laws of blessings in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah. He should briefly record his Torah insights, so as not to forget them, and then pray the afternoon minchah prayer, and return home. Rabbi Chaim did not know the purpose of this mission, but he implicitly followed his master's instructions.

Although the place the Baal Shem Tov had designated was only eight miles from the city, Rabbi Chaim and Rabbi Moshe Meshel traveled for many hours, because there were problems with the coach every step of the way. First the reins broke; then the harness straps snapped; a wheel fell off; the shaft connecting the horses cracked; and so on. It took time to deal with every mishap and to repair everything that needed to be fixed. They had set out early in the morning but, because of the many difficulties and delays, arrived at the place the Baal Shem Tov had indicated only at two o'clock in the afternoon.

Following the Baal Shem Tov's directives, Rabbi Chaim walked into the woods on the side of the road and led Rabbi Moshe Meshel and the coach driver to an opening among the trees, a flat area that seemed to be a ruin of some sort, with the remnants of a number of buildings. He sat there studying for four hours and, because of the hot summer day, became very thirsty. While he continued studying, his companions went to search for some water. In the midst of the thick forest undergrowth they discovered a fountain, and brought back fresh water for Rabbi Chaim to drink. He also washed his hands with that water before he prayed minchah; then they returned to Lvov.

At the beginning of the month of Elul, Rabbi Chaim went to the Baal Shem Tov in Medzibuz and told him that ever since he had been sent on the mission to the ruin in the forest that day, his eyes were opened in Torah study and his heart had opened in the service of G-d. He had made more spiritual progress in that brief period than ever before in his life. He thanked G-d and he thanked the Baal Shem Tov for sending him there, because he undoubtedly merited to benefit from the radiance of a holy soul buried nearby.

At the Shabbat meal, the Baal Shem Tov told Rabbi Chaim that the purpose of his trip was to help a Jew who had passed away one hundred and seventeen years earlier. This man, named Moshe the son of Shmuel Tzadok, had been a great Torah scholar, but was also an atheist who led a dissolute life. Yet, in his advanced old age,

he had fully repented. "The time had come for the Torah that Moshe had studied in impurity to be raised up," said the Baal Shem Tov. "And I chose you, Rabbi Chaim, for the task. That clearing in the forest is the place where Reb Moshe's estate stood, and where he is buried. With G-d's help, your pure study and prayer elevated what had remained below, trapped by the kelipot ('shells,' the negative elements of creation). By succeeding in this holy work, you merited to be renewed spiritually.

"You also accomplished another great task there," said the Baal Shem Tov. "It is written in the holy Zohar that the lower waters weep, crying, 'We want to appear before the Holy King!' From the time that the Holy One, blessed be He, separated between the lower waters and the upper waters on the second day of creation, the lower waters have been weeping and begging to appear before the Holy King, that they be used for holy purposes: handwashing before prayer; immersion in a mikvah for a mitzvah, or for purification before prayer and Torah study; handwashing before eating with a blessing mentioning G-d's name; or water for drinking with a blessing before and after. The weeping and pleading of these lower waters, that they be used for mitzvot and acts of holiness and purity, may continue for hundreds and thousands of years, until a Jew passes by and washes his hands for prayer or drinks some water to satisfy his thirst, making appropriate the blessings.

"Near the former property and grave of Reb Moshe was a fountain that had been weeping for five thousand five hundred and nineteen years, since the creation of the world: Why should it be less than all the other fountains in the world? Why should its waters be denied their elevation? Since the Holy One, blessed be He, had created it, no one had ever made a blessing over its waters; they had never been used for holy purposes. That day," said the Baal Shem Tov to Rabbi Chaim, "when you drank its water and used it to wash your hands for prayer, you elevated that fountain. This was all the working of divine providence. Every creature and creation has a time for its elevation, and it is foreordained when it will occur and by whom. And that is true for each and every soul; it too has its time for elevation."

PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL

The Parshah of Tazria continues the discussion of the laws of tumah v'taharah, ritual impurity and purity.

A woman giving birth should undergo a process of purification, which includes immersing in a mikvah (a naturally gathered pool of water) and bringing offerings to the Holy Temple. All male infants are to be circumcised on the eighth day of life.

Tzaraat (often mistranslated as "leprosy") is a supra-natural plague, which also can afflict garments. If white or pink patches appear on a person's skin (dark red or green in garments), a kohen is summoned. Judging by various signs, such as an increase in size of the afflicted area after a seven-day quarantine, the kohen pronounces it tamei (impure) or tahor (pure).

A person afflicted with tzaraat must dwell alone outside of the camp (or city) until he is healed. The afflicted area in a garment is

CANDLE LIGHTING



Shabbos 5 - 6 April		
	Begins	Ends
Melbourne	6:50	7:46
Adelaide	6:48	7:42
Brisbane	5:24	6:16
Darwin	6:30	7:19
Gold Coast	5:22	6:14
Perth	5:50	6:43
Sydney	6:28	7:22
Canberra	6:35	7:30
Launceston	6:39	7:37
Auckland	6:52	7:47
Wellington	6:49	7:46
Hobart	6:38	7:36
Byron Bay	6:21	7:13

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PARSHAS TAZRIA PARSHAS HACHODESH

29 ADAR BEIS • 5 APRIL

FRIDAY NIGHT:	MINCHA	6.55 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS	7.25 PM
SHABBOS DAY:	LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA	10.29 AM
	SHACHARIS	10.00 AM
	MINCHA	6.40 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS	7.46 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS	8.00/9.15/10.00 AM
	MINCHA	6.45 PM
	MARIV	6.35 PM