

IN HONOR OF

Chaya Mushka שתחילי **Muchnik**

On the occasion of her birthday, 26 Nissan, 5780

AND IN HONOR OF HER SISTER

Devorah Leah שתחילי **Muchnik**

On the occasion of her 8th birthday, 29 Nissan, 5780

AND IN HONOR OF THEIR SISTERS AND BROTHERS שיחיו

May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride
to their family and a Torah light to their community.

*

DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS

Rabbi & Mrs. **Dov** and **Racheli** שיחיו **Muchnik**

Shluchim of the Rebbe in Oxnard, California

* * *

IN HONOR OF

Tzipora Simcha שתחילי **Zaghi**

On the occasion of her third birthday

30 Nissan - 1st day of Rosh Chodesh Iyar, 5780

AND IN HONOR OF HER SISTER AND BROTHER

Daniella Esther and **Moshe Natan** שיחיו **Zaghi**

May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride
to their family and a Torah light to their community.

*

DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS

Mr. & Mrs. **Michael** and **Malka Chana** שיחיו **Zaghi**

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Tazria-Metzora, 5780
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by
Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

Tazria

THE HIDDEN HOLINESS

Tzara'as is an external blemish, a surface impurity that cannot be cured by one's own efforts. Hence, Moshiach is metaphorically called a metzora, one with tzara'as, for he will refine the "outermost edge" of the children of Israel. The tiny, out-of-the-way blemish we cannot reach on our own prevents the world from being a dwelling place for G-dliness. But Moshiach will do more than refine the negative; he will also reveal the positive. Tzara'as is the most extreme, most external manifestation of the attribute of Divine Judgment. It is the most physical form of the impulse to move inward and upward, to dissolve into G-dliness.

As mentioned previously, names signify the inner meaning of something. When two things share a name, we can expect some vital connection between them. This is true even if the name they share is a nickname or description, rather than their actual names. In a fascinating Talmudic passage, the rabbis propose a number of different names for Moshiach. While the suggested names often refer to the rabbi's teacher, each name also alludes to a particular characteristic of Moshiach.

In one such passage, the Sages declare Moshiach will be called "the *metzora* of Beis Rebbe." A *metzora* is one stricken with *tzara'as*, a spiritual condition that manifests itself as a skin disease, a blemish on the outer surface of an object or person. This assertion is based on a prophecy by Isaiah. Once Moshiach is recognized, he says, the Jewish people will declare, "Indeed he bore our illnesses and our pains – he carried them, yet we accounted him as plagued, smitten by G-d and oppressed." The word "plagued" technically refers to the plague of *tzara'as*. Hence the Talmud identifies Moshiach as a *metzora*, one plagued.

break the walls of the houses, reveal the hidden treasures of G-dliness. By destroying the houses of idolatry, the previously concealed spiritual and material gold can be used to build a new house, the house of G-d, the Third *Beis HaMikdash*.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 27:107-115)

evil is nullified. Therefore, the essence of the transgression, the sinful act changes.

There is a remarkable implication to all this: every transgression contains within it an element of the permitted. Since *teshuvah* transforms, and *teshuvah* is a mitzvah, there must be an aspect of the permitted and holy within the prohibited and sinful.

Obviously, there is nothing remarkable about a case where a practical reparation is possible. For example, if one does not tithe properly, that mistake or oversight is easily corrected.

However, an act that violates G-d's Will remains a violation of G-d's Will. One cannot deliberately transgress a commandment and expect *teshuvah* to rectify the situation. Indeed, one who says, "I will sin and repent" is not given the opportunity to repent. Therefore the sin, the deliberate transgression, has no element of the permitted. It should remain essentially evil.

And yet, *teshuvah* affects not only the person, but the transgression itself. Remarkably, it causes a retroactive redemption. It transforms past evil, turning deliberate, willful sins and desecration into actual merits. Other transformations are conditional, and so always possessed the possibility of change from one state to another. For instance, a sale may be reversed because of a change in circumstances or failure to meet a condition. In this case, the altered status existed in potential from the start. *Teshuvah*, though, affects that which was not conditional, but at first was completely and irrevocably sinful.

A Jew can transform the past because he is in essence attached to G-d, who transcends the boundaries of time. A *teshuvah* from the depths of the heart calls forth that essence. The great love of a Jew for G-d places him beyond the confines of past, present and future. That which was can be transformed into that which should and will be.

In the natural order, man cannot purify himself from his negai'im, which is why the subject is divided between two portions. Purification comes through *teshuvah*. But the Jewish people, in a state of *teshuvah*, can

What characteristics do a *metzora* and Moshiach have in common?

First, we need to understand the nature of *tzara'as*, the plague which afflicts a *metzora*. The Torah defines *tzara'as* as follows: "When a man will have a rising or scab in the skin of his flesh, or a bright spot and it becomes in the skin of his flesh the plague of *tzara'as*, then he shall be brought to Aaron the kohen or one of his sons the kohanim." The plague of *tzara'as* appears on the skin – the outermost part of the person. Equally significant, it says "when a man . . ." using the word "*adam*" for "man," rather than the more common "*ish*." The Torah uses several names for a human being, depending on the context. The name "*adam*" as a general designation refers to Israel, the Jewish people at their highest.

Accordingly, *tzara'as* affects only an individual who has perfected himself, a Jew who has all but completed his Divine service. At that, it touches only the outermost aspect, the fringes, the most external or peripheral aspects of the person. Only the exterior edge needs refinement.

By and large, the Jewish people have already been purified through the long years of exile. Only the remnant, the outer layer remains unrefined. Moshiach has only to purify the external, the evil of the Jewish people that is only "skin-deep," so to speak. Therefore, he is called "*metzora*."

That Moshiach is called a *metzora* explains the length of the exile. The Jewish people, whose essence is holiness, has just about refined itself – and the world – through the Torah learned and mitzvos performed over the centuries. Still, there remain some peripheral imperfections or impurities. Although the *tzara'as* is only on the surface, its existence still renders the Jewish people – and the world – "impure" and incomplete. This is the task of Moshiach, to refine the "outermost edge" of the children of Israel. This also explains

why Isaiah says Moshiach will bear “our illnesses and our pains,” that tiny, out-of-the-way blemish we can not reach on our own. And that blemish prevents the world from being a dwelling place for G-dliness.

Still we may ask, what is the inner reason for associating the term *metzora* with Moshiach? At first glance, such an association is troubling, despite its metaphoric meaning. “Metzora” is a negative term, indicating one ritually impure and separated from the community. But the essence of Moshiach is Redemption – the rebuilding of the Temple and the ingathering of the exiles. Clearly, something of that essence must be reflected in the concept of *metzora*. Moshiach must be more than the one who purifies the transgressions of Israel; he must be the one who brings Redemption. Within “*metzora*” must be more than refinement of the negative; there must be revelation of the positive.

In simple terms, *tzara'as* represents a concealment of G-dliness. *Tzara'as* is the most severe form of ritual impurity. Ritual impurity occurs when there is a concealment of the inner, Divine life force.

When the Torah outlines the laws of *tzara'as* – how to identify it, how to treat it, etc., the kohen plays a pivotal role. An individual or object must be seen by a kohen before being designated as having *tzara'as*. Once cured, the individual cannot rejoin the community, cannot be considered ritually pure and able to enter the Sanctuary, until after a kohen-directed ceremony. The mere appearance of *tzara'as* does not make someone ritually impure. He must be declared so by the kohen. Until then, he remains in a state of holiness. *Tzara'as* does not become meaningful until the kohen recognizes it as such. Because of his spiritual nature, precisely a kohen had to declare a person a *metzora*.

Aaron was the embodiment of kindness; he was a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, and one who brought peace between a man and

with *negai'im* so that he will do *teshuvah*. When a Jew returns, removes the last vestige of his acts of impurity, he reveals the “treasure of gold” within his soul. A Baal *Teshuvah* – one who has repented – stands higher than a complete *tzaddik*. Thus, it turns out that *negai'im* – the severest form of impurity -initiate the highest elevation.

We can apply this idea to our own times and situation: the length and severity of the current exile surely is the harshest and most severe the Jewish people have experienced. It follows that, as with the person and houses afflicted with *negai'im*, there is a treasure of gold, the highest spiritual and physical elevation, hidden within the adversity. The highest levels of holiness inherent in man and the world, originally concealed, can be revealed only through the process of rectification, of *teshuvah*.

This indicates the intimate and integral connection between *teshuvah* and Redemption. As soon as there is *teshuvah*, there is Redemption. Further, the Sages declare that *teshuvah* motivated by love transforms deliberate transgressions into meritorious acts. Obviously, in the days of Moshiach, all Israel will achieve this status.

Still, there is a problem, echoed in the structure of the Torah readings. We must distinguish between the individual and the object, between the one afflicted and the affliction itself, between the person and the *negai'im*. Last week's reading, *Tazria*, dealt with the *negai'im*, while this week's reading, *Metzora*, deals with the purification of man. So *Teshuvah* purifies and elevates the individual, raising him to a level higher than the *tzaddik*. But, it seems, the deliberate transgressions remain transgressions. Things that are loathsome and impure remain so; the prohibited act remains forbidden.

We know from the prophets that the blemish and iniquity last only until the day when “death will be swallowed up forever,” when Moshiach comes and the spirit of impurity will be removed forever. Still, we can anticipate the Redemption, foreshadow the coming of Moshiach, through a *teshuvah* so great that it transforms transgressions into merits. Not only is the individual elevated and purified, but the

so-called plagues – are still active, that is, when the person may be purified. But the purification process isn't discussed until this week's reading, Metzora. On the other hand, this week's portion also discusses **all** the details of *negai'im* in houses.

Thus, the laws of *negai'im* are structured as follows: in *Tazria*, *negai'im* for a person; in *Tazria*, *negai'im* for clothing and the purification therefrom; in Metzora, purification of a person from *negai'im*; in Metzora, *negai'im* for houses and the purification therefrom.

The laws of the human being are divided between the two Torah readings and separated by the laws of clothing. Since the laws for houses follow a person's purification ritual, we may conclude there is an inner connection between houses in general and the ritual purification of the person.

Now, the *negai'im* of houses have an unusual description: it says G-d Himself will place the *negai'im* on the houses. Two contradictory explanations are given for this: one is that the inhabitants hid their gold in the walls; breaking down the houses with *negai'im* revealed the gold. The other is that the idolatry of the Canaanites was so foul, it penetrated their very houses. To remove the loathsome spirit of idolatry, the houses that had to be destroyed were marked, as it were, with *negai'im*.

Of course, not all the houses had *negai'im* and not all of them were destroyed. As there are various levels of impurity, so the degree to which it penetrates an object varies. In most cases, simple acts which took possession of the house, such as putting up a mezuzah, sufficed to remove the impurity and remnant of idolatry. But sometimes the spirit of abomination is so deep it cannot be elevated without destroying its "housing." And yet, the "treasures of gold" are located precisely there.

This concept applies to *negai'im* in general: of all the possible impurities – obstructions to holiness – *negai'im* – the so-called plagues or leprosy – are the most severe. Nevertheless, the appearance of *negai'im* provides a unique opportunity for spiritual elevation. They are an unusual occurrence with a special purpose. A person is afflicted

his neighbor and between a husband and wife. Kindness is the spiritual attribute primarily associated with the kohanim.

In Jewish mysticism, the opposite of kindness is judgment or force. *Tzara'as* is the most physical manifestation of this spiritual attribute, the extreme opposite of the kohen.

Kindness by its nature moves outward and downward, from above to below. It is expansive. Judgment or force by its nature moves inward and upward. It is restrictive. Mystically, kindness is an outpouring of revelation. The kohanim, through their service in the Temple and the priestly blessing, draw down a revelation of G-dliness.

But too much revelation can overwhelm and overpower. There must be a restraint of revelation, a limitation. This limitation is measured according to the recipient. It withholds an overwhelming outpouring of G-dliness, allowing the physical world to exist.

It is the impulse to move inward and upward – the attribute of Divine Judgment – that limits the impulse to move outward and downward – the attribute of Divine Kindness.

It also serves as a channel, so that G-dliness can descend into the physical. As creation becomes more physical, there has to be more concealment of the G-dliness that sustains it.

Once begun, however, the inner G-dliness can be so constrained that it descends to the level of *tzara'as*, a plague of impurity.

Tzara'as is a plague of the skin. It is the most extreme, most external manifestation of the attribute of Divine Judgment. It is the most physical form of the impulse to move inward and upward.

The spiritual *tzara'as* in man is the plague of desire, a longing to leave the restrictions of a body, to cleave to G-dliness with complete self-nullification and never return to the physical world. This is an impurity, the opposite of holiness. For G-d does not

desire expiration of the soul, but the service of “return.” The intent behind creation is that through Torah and mitzvos, G-dliness will be drawn into the world. The soul is to illuminate and be revealed within in a body.

In the physical world, that force may be so restricted and constrained as to appear negative. But it represents the potential for unbounded holiness. Thus Moshiach is called a metzora, for Moshiach will bring Redemption. Then the force of G-dliness will be fully and completely revealed within the physical. Then a holiness without boundaries or limitations will be revealed within the most mundane, material level.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 37:33-36)

Metzora

RETROACTIVE REDEMPTION

The laws of negai'im, or plagues, are presented in two separate Torah readings. In Tazria, negai'im for a person are defined; in Metzora, the purification process of a person is described. Metzora also describes both the definition and the purification of negai'im for houses. Of all the possible impurities – obstructions to holiness – negai'im are the most severe. Nevertheless, the appearance of negai'im provides a unique opportunity for spiritual elevation – the chance to do teshuvah. The inner connection between the negai'im of houses and that of people is the retroactive redemption of teshuvah.

This week's Torah portion contains the laws of negai'im. Negai'im, translated as plagues or leprosy, actually are blemishes that appear on the skin, on clothes or on houses. These physical discolorations reveal a spiritual imperfection. The laws of *negai'im* apply only when the *Beis HaMikdash*, the Temple, is standing and the kohanim are offering sacrifices. Though not applicable now, these laws of *negai'im* will become a practical issue imminently, with the coming of Moshiach.

But, they must also have a current relevance. The inner, spiritual significance of any aspect of Torah remains eternally valid; this is true even when, for whatever reason, the physical expression of that significance is temporarily suspended. That we do not, for this brief moment, have a *Beis HaMikdash*, does not affect its value or importance. What was true before the destruction, and will be true after the rebuilding, must also be true now, during the exile and its last moments.

The laws of *negai'im* seem ordered in a peculiar manner. Last week's reading, *Tazria*, describes the appearance and dimensions of the negai'im, explaining which blemishes make a human being or clothing ritually impure. It also explains how to determine if the *negai'im* – the