



# Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

שבת הגדול

## TEAR DOWN THE WALLS

RABBI DAVID SHABTAI

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KAYLA BENSMIHEN ('19)

ETAN WINOGRAD ('18)

ILANA RINDSBERG ('17)

ELANA SILKIN ('19)

LANA ROSENTHAL ('17)

כי תבואו אל ארץ  
כנען אשר אני נותן  
לכם לאחוזת ונתתי  
נגע צרעת בבית ארץ  
אחוזתכם

*"When you enter the Land of Canaan that I have given you as an inheritance and I will afflict your home in the Land with tzara'at."*

(14:34)

Rashi picks up on the peculiarity of the language, seemingly indicating that Hashem is promising to afflict people with tzara'at of the home. Generally speaking, tzara'at is presented as a punishment, and the gemara (Erkhein 16a) lists various transgressions which may result in a punishment of tzara'at. Why then does the Torah make it seem so positive? Even if we are destined to sin and be punished, why is it phrased as a promise?

Rashi quotes the famous midrash that before fleeing the land, the Canaanites hid their treasures within the walls of their homes so that they wouldn't be found. When Bnei Yisrael took over the land, they would not have found them. However, when their homes would be afflicted with tzara'at and they would eventually need to tear down the walls, they would find the hidden treasure. The promise and positive language was specifically about this additional benefit.

The Sefer Yavin Shemuah wonders about this peculiar arrangement. Chazal are pretty clear that tzara'at is a punishment for tzarut ha-ayin, literally "narrow eyes," but more broadly, stinginess and a negative outlook toward people and life.

Why then should such a person be rewarded? Worse, tzarut ha-ayin is a negative trait that is best avoided. But it seems that those who manage to avoid it – to live a life of optimism and positivity – aren't re-

warded! The arrangement certainly seems incongruous. He explains that not everything that appears is what is actually going on. The pasuk in Mishlei states that “טוב עין הוא יבורך” – “one who has a ‘generous eye’ will be blessed” (22:9). A “generous eye” is the opposite of tzarut ha-ayin, describing one who sees the good in people, who has a positive and optimistic outlook on life. Such a person will certainly be blessed from Hashem. He or she doesn’t need their home to be afflicted with tzara’at to receive Divine reward; Hashem will grant them their due in more compassionate and happy ways.

The lesson here, explains the Yavin Shemuah, is that Hashem has compassion even on one who doesn’t possess the best qualities. Hashem is trying to teach a lesson to one who is tzar ayin; the tzara’at is a punishment. After all, the person will have to rip down the walls of his home! But the purpose is not simply to punish but to teach. It is Hashem’s way of sending a message that such a person needs to wake up and change something significant about his personality, about who he is. Since it’s not about punishment but rather about teaching a lesson, Hashem provides such a person with “compensation” for having his house destroyed. As an added bonus, the person who started off with tzarut ha-ayin may come to realize that in fact, just as this hidden treasure was a gift from Hashem, so too is everything else in life. That alone may help cure his negative outlook on life.

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## TWO IS BETTER THAN ONE

KAYLA BENSMIHEN

IN THIS WEEK’S PARSHA, WE LEARN ABOUT HOW A PERSON MUST purify himself from tzara’at. We are told he must bring two pure live birds, cedar wood, crimson thread, and a hyssop branch. The Torah then continues on to instruct what one must do with the two birds. One bird must be slaughtered, and the live bird should be taken with the crimson thread,

hyssop, and the cedar wood. It should be dipped in the blood of the slaughtered bird. After this the kohen sprinkles the blood seven times over the person with tzara’at, and then the bird is set free.

**Rav Shlomo Ganzfried asks, why are two birds used instead of one, if one of the birds will be set free anyway?**

He answers that people may come to believe that the only way not to say lashon hara is to not say anything at all and instead just stay quiet. However, the reason there is a second bird, and the reason the second bird is left alive, is to show us that there are positive forms of speaking. The two birds represent opposites of one another, the negative part of speaking, which is lashon hara, and the positive part of speaking, which is lashon tov, like divrei Torah. This teaches us that our speech, like most other things in life, is neither intrinsically good nor bad. It’s how we use it that counts!

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## MAN VS. MAN

ETAN WINOGRAD ('18)

THE GEMARA ARACHIN (16A) TEACHES US THAT A PERSON WILL GET THE PUNISHMENT of tzara’at if he commits one of seven different transgressions. The most famous of these is lashon hara, improper speech. A person who gets tzara’at must receive assistance from a kohen, who will help him atone for his improper actions.

The Torah uses the word אָדָם -- man -- when referring to a person who brings a korban for having tzara’at. The term אָדָם usually implies that a person is of greater importance than when the word אִישׁ, also meaning man, is used. **Why does the Torah use the language that denotes a person of distinction when discussing someone who has spoken lashon hara?** The distinction and importance of the person

is not about the fact that he has spoken lashon hara, but rather about how he deals with the situation. A person of distinction is humiliated that he has sinned and has spoken lashon hara, and he therefore focuses on improving himself to make sure he does not commit the sin again. A person of lesser distinction ignores his transgression and is not as wise and focused on improving himself.

A great person may speak lashon hara accidentally, but will then have the determination and the desire to change and improve. If he demonstrates these qualities, then he is still considered a person of great stature.

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## BE A GIVER

ILANA RINDSBERG ('17)

THIS SHABBAT, THE SHABBAT BEFORE PESACH, IS KNOWN AS Shabbat Hagadol. This name cannot only be attributed to this Shabbat because of the lengthy drasha that the rabbi will give; there must be a different, deeper meaning to it. The meaning is found in the haftorah for the day, 21 pesukim from the book of Malachi. In the passage that is read, Malachi is denouncing the Jews who returned to Israel after the Persian conquest. The rabbis do not want to end on a bad note, so they also included a portion that mentions the great (“hagadol”) day, our redemption, which will happen in the month of Nissan just like the first time we were redeemed, Pesach.

**This begs the question: how can we bring the redemption faster?**

If Malachi could speak to us today, he would tell us that we need to feed the hungry and house the homeless, that the only way to go about this is by giving to others. The Talmud relates a story that whenever Rabbi Huna would sit down to eat, he would open his doors and call to anyone who was hungry

to come and eat with him. We must give to the less fortunate, like Rabbi Huna, especially at the Seder when we invite everyone into our household to share a meal. So, this Pesach, be a giver -- give to people who don't necessarily have as much as you do.

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## TWO BIRDS, ONE STONE

ELANA SILKIN ('19)

PARSHAT METZORA OPENS WITH THE LAWS OF WHAT THE PERSON WHO HAS BEEN afflicted with tzara'at must do to re-enter the camp. A kohen approaches the metzora, observes that the individual has been healed, and then takes two birds, cedar wood, a crimson thread, and hyssop. One of the birds is to be slaughtered and the other is to be set free after it gets dipped into the blood of the bird that has been sacrificed.

**Why is one bird set free?** To answer this question, we must look to the event that warrants this whole process: tzara'at. The individual has been alone for seven days outside of the camp with no one to speak to. He has had time to think about the damage he has done with his words (lashon hara).

In order to drive the point home, perhaps the metzora needs a visual reminder of how damaging lashon hara can be. Slaughtering the first bird shows the individual that words have the ability to really hurt others. The bird that is set free shows that when a person speaks lashon hara, the damage goes far beyond the reaches of the individual who spoke.

Both the kohen and the individual who is coming back into the camp have no way of knowing how far and where the bird is going, just like the words that were spoken. This may be even more relevant today; when we use Facebook and Snapchat we think we delete things, but they live on far beyond our reach.

# LET GOD IN

LANA ROSENTHAL ('17)

THE SHABBAT BEFORE PESACH IS CALLED SHABBAT HaGadol, on which we commemorate the Shabbat before Bnei Yisrael left Egypt. On this day, the 10th of Nissan, five days before leaving Mitzrayim, Moshe commanded the members of Bnei Yisrael to take lambs and tie the animals to their bedposts in preparation for the korban pesach, which would be offered the night before the nation left Egypt. This act was one of out-right defiance to the Egyptians, to whom the lamb was a god. Despite their anger, the Egyptians were unable to stop Bnei Yisrael from doing this mitzvah.

Rabbi Yoel Sirkis, in his book Bayit Chadash, asks a practical question: In Mitzrayim, it just so happened that the tenth day of Nissan fell out on Shabbat. However, the mitzvah is to take a lamb on the 10th of Nissan, which does not generally fall out on Shabbat. Therefore, why do we continue to celebrate these events on Shabbat instead of on the 10th of Nissan, whatever day of the week that may be?

To answer this question, we must look for the deeper connection between Shabbat and Pesach. Every Shabbat, we recognize the creation of the world; God worked for six days, creating nature and every being, and on the seventh day He rested. Deists believe that this is the extent of God's power, that He set the world in motion and then left it to run by itself.

On Pesach, however, we celebrate God's continued involvement in the world. Hashem's performance of miracles during Yetziat Mitzrayim proves that not only did He create nature, but He is still involved in the world, and can still control nature. On Pesach, Hashem takes the Jewish people out of Egypt to be His nation, confirming His intent to be heavily involved in our lives and in the physical world that He created.

These two holidays of Shabbat and Pesach sum up our belief in God and His abilities. Not only did He create the world, but He is still present. It is our job to let Him in.



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