

MARCH 31, 2008

Parashat Tazria

Concerning Us

V'tamei tamei yikrah “*And he will cry ‘unclean, unclean’*” (Leviticus 13:45)

The *metzora* who suffered from a dreaded skin affliction – brought on, Torah tells us, by sin – had to wear special clothes and ignore his grooming. Ibn Ezra explains that the different clothes of the *metzora* reflected his status as a sinner to all who saw him. The *metzora* had to walk around and call out that he was *tamei* for two reasons: so that others would know to stay away, but also so that others would pray for his repentance and recovery. The laws of the *metzora* teach an important lesson. We would imagine that we should shun the sinner and that the *metzora* should be left alone. Yet Torah sets up the law in the opposite fashion – ensuring that everyone takes concern with his situation.

Concerning ourselves with someone like the *metzora*, who tradition tells us has caused his own misery, is not always easy – but it is the right thing to do. We all know people – neighbors, co-workers, even fellow congregants – who bring trouble on themselves. We cannot do the work of *t’shuvah* for these people, but we can show concern and try to make *t’shuvah* easier.

Israel continues to be concerned with improving the lives of Palestinians even as she takes steps to defend her citizens against terrorist groups. The Jewish state allows food aid to reach Palestinian civilians even though terrorists have tried to use Israel’s kindness to smuggle in chemicals for bomb-making. Despite continuing rocket attacks and terrorism, Prime Minister Olmert is still trying to make the peace process work. Last week, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak notified Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad that Israel was prepared to allow up to 600 Palestinian security forces, trained in Jordan under a U.S.-sponsored program, to be deployed in the West Bank city of Jenin. Known as a hotbed of terrorism, Jenin has been relatively quiet in recent months. While there is far more that needs to be done, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has taken steps in recent months to clamp down on terrorist groups and to bolster law and order in the West Bank.

Israel is to be applauded for both concerning herself with the daily lives of average Palestinians and also taking necessary steps to defend her citizens. ■

Outside the Camp

Hu badad yeisheiv “*He will dwell apart*” (Leviticus 13:46)

Our *parashah* goes into extensive detail concerning people who have communicable diseases. In most cases, they are isolated until all symptoms have disappeared. However, this quarantine is not purely for medical reasons. Indeed, *tsara’at* is interpreted as not only a physical malady but a social and spiritual malady as well. Rashi (citing BT Arachin 16b) teaches us that the leper is treated differently since “he, through *lashon hara*, caused separation between man and wife and between a person and his peers, he, too shall be separated.”

Society is based on community. Being part of a community requires interaction with other people. It is not good being alone outside of the camp. Indeed, this punishment was imposed on the *metzora* so that he could be healed physically and recognize the wrongness of his ways. Ultimately, the goal of the leper's banishment was to give him time to think about his illness and what led to his predicament and to reenter society as a changed person.

The community of nations acts in much the same fashion. Iranian President Ahmadinejad has frequently called for Israel to be wiped off the map or to "disappear." He has also called Israel a cancerous growth and "filthy bacteria." Beyond rhetorical statements, Iran continues to enrich uranium and to develop technologies that, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, serve no known purpose other than the development of nuclear weapons. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard continues to train and fund Hamas and Hizballah. Iran remains the world's leading state sponsor of terror and a threat to the region and the world. The U.N. Security Council recently passed a third round of sanctions that ratcheted up demands that the Islamic Republic end its pursuit of nuclear weapons capacity. The international community must act swiftly to ensure that these sanctions as well as sanctions imposed in the first two resolutions are implemented. Last week, the US Government took another step in its efforts to isolate Iran from the world financial system by imposing financial sanction on a Bahrain bank that is controlled by Iran's Bank Melli.

Imposing biting economic sanctions and tough international pressure on Iran is the best way to force Tehran to stop its illegal, dangerous activities. Just like the *metzora*, Iran must be isolated and kept out of the world camp as long as it continues to violate its own treaty obligations and the disregard the will of the international community. ■

Language of Blessing

Zot torat negah tzara'at "This is the law of the plague of leprosy" (Leviticus 13:59)

Our *parashah*, as we have seen, deals extensively with the causes of *tzara'at*. The Sages say (BT Arachin 15b) that for three transgressions one forfeits his portion in *olam habah*: murder, adultery, and idol worship, and that *lashon hara* is equivalent to all three. The Chafetz Chayim adds that when someone accustoms himself to speaking *lashon hara*, he rationalizes it to the extent that he begins to view *lashon hara* as entirely permissible. If *lashon hara* is viewed as equivalent to murder, adultery, and idolatry, how could anyone possibly view it as permissible?

We learned in Parashat No'ach that the repercussion of *dor haflagah* building *Migdal Bavel* was the imposition on humanity of different languages. Language has been a dividing force ever since – sometimes by its misuse, but often simply because we can't communicate with one another.

More than 9,000 Jewish schoolchildren across Israel will have a unique opportunity to learn spoken Arabic this year as part of the "Language as a Cultural Bridge" project initiated by The Abraham Fund. Amnon Beeri-Sulitzeanu, the executive director of the Abraham Fund, a non-profit organization committed to advancing coexistence and equality in Israel, said, "Teaching the Arabic language and culture in Jewish schools reduces fear and stereotypes, and creates an honest and informed dialogue between the Jewish and Arab communities." The program is primarily taught by Arabic teachers and is not only about spoken language, but also about Arabic culture and life. "We introduce kids to the rich, fascinating, compelling Arabic culture. They learn about films, books, crafts, foods, they learn the beautiful stories of the Arabic people. It's a completely different framework from that used in the past," says Beeri-Sulitzeanu.

God-willing, language can be a force for good and peace, not just something that divides and threatens. ■