

APRIL 7, 2008

Parashat M'tzora

Brick by Brick

V'natati nega tzara'at b'veit “And I put the plague of tzara'at in a house” (Leviticus 14:34)

Among the litany of boils, lesions and diseases in our *parashah*, we are presented with a detailed account of what happens when a house is infected with *tzara'at*. The house must be taken apart brick by brick and the bricks are to be discarded outside of the camp. While there are many *mitzvot* that are categorized as *mitzvot hateluyot ba'aretz* (see BT Nega'im 12:4), a diseased house might be the most unusual on the list. Both Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni teach us that, due to the fact that the *beit hamikdash* would be built in Israel, the land had to be “clean and pure.”

We all know how important preventive medicine is. Regular visits to our family physician can catch potential problems early on as opposed to waiting until symptoms appear. Whether it's a building infested with *tzara'at*, a human body, or our relationships with others – protecting health is far less painful than regaining health. Keeping a house in order and ourselves far from *tzara'at* is far less painful than seeing our houses taken apart brick by brick.

The work of pro-Israel activism is, in a way, preventive medicine for the U.S.-Israel relationship. It is true that Americans' attitudes toward Israel are overwhelmingly favorable. But while our elected officials' support of the alliance between the U.S. and Israel is based on common values and strategic interests, we should remember that there is nothing inevitable about the U.S.-Israel relationship. Only our activism can ensure that this friendship remain strong well into the future. Last month, The US House of Representatives approved H. Res. 951 condemning the ongoing rocket attacks on Southern Israel from Gaza and supporting Israel's right to defend her people. The resolution passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 404-1. While it would be easy to see this tremendous show of support as confirmation that our work is done, we should remember that one good checkup at the doctor doesn't mean we never have to go back.

Soon, the Jewish people will once again commemorate the Passover. During the Pesach *seder*, we mention (and re-enact through the *charoset*) the bricks made by our ancestors in Egypt. In this season, let us remember that, just as a house or a monument is built brick by brick, so can it be taken down brick by brick. The bricks we make today, rather than symbols of slavery, are the building blocks of freedom. Let us move forward and build together. ■

Messenger Matters

V'natati nega tzara'at b'veit “And I put the plague of tzara'at in a house” (Leviticus 14:34)

Davar acher. *Tzara'at* was a discoloration that showed itself on one who had sinned. While it is widely known that *tzara'at* was an affliction of the skin, it is not as well known that *tzara'at* first appeared on one's possessions – especially on one's house. In his commentary, Ramban points out that HaShem is careful to write, “I shall put the plague of *tzara'at*.” HaShem was directly responsible for the disease being found in the home. *Tzara'at* wasn't just a

skin blemish or a reason to call in the people from Extreme Makeover: Home Edition. It was a punishment – a message directly from God to the sinner to repent.

People are always more likely to take admonition more seriously when it comes from a source they trust and respect – all the more so when it comes directly from HaShem. Whether heard from their rabbis and cantors, family members, or dear friends, the source of the “suggestion” to repent matters.

For this reason, it is vitally important that the international community be united in preventing Iran from continuing down the path toward nuclear weapons. Testifying before the Senate Finance Committee, Undersecretary of the U.S. Treasury, Stuart Levy, said, "In reaction to U.S. and multilateral actions, the world's leading financial institutions have largely stopped dealing with Iran, and especially Iranian banks, in any currency. Furthermore, in recent weeks, the United States has imposed a new series of biting economic, security and political measures aimed at persuading Iran to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons. The international community, especially our EU allies, must join the U.S. in imposing these additional steps. United action is imperative to effectively implement a comprehensive regime of economic, diplomatic and political sanctions aimed at preventing a nuclear-armed Iran.

The messenger matters – and only an unequivocal demand from the international community for Iran to abandon nuclear enrichment and cease all activities consistent with weapons development will be heeded by the regime in Tehran. ■

More than Morale

Zot t'hiyeh torat ha'm'tzorah “This will be the law of the m'tzorah” (Leviticus 14:2)

Our parashah begins with the purification process of the one afflicted with tzara'at. Chazal – the Kli Yakar's interpretation is often cited – tell us that *m'tzorah* actually means that the sufferer has engaged in the sin of *motzi shem ra*. The Ohr HaChayim wonders why this fact – that the disease is caused by *lashon hara* – is hidden in the description of the purification process. He explains that this is to teach us that tzara'at is purely a spiritual, rather than a physical, disease.

Physical, emotional, and spiritual health are all related to one another. For decades, scientists have taken seriously the so-called “placebo effect,” in which some sick patients given fake medicine see improvement because they believe they're receiving treatment. We also know that depression and other mental disorders can have devastating physical symptoms. Similarly, we know that morale is important – whether we're talking about the teams in the NCAA Final Four or something more serious.

The continuing barrage of rockets against the citizens of the southern-Israeli town of Sderot is not only a threat to the physical safety of the community, but has done terrible damage to the emotional well-being of the residents. With thousands of rockets having fallen since Israel's unilateral pullout from Gaza, civilians live in a constant state of fear. Recent studies have shown that over 90% of children in Sderot suffer from symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder – symptoms which doctors do not know how to treat because the traumatic stress in question is ongoing rather than being “post.” Israel has every right to take steps to protect her citizens. If the limited measures to date are insufficient to stop the Palestinian violence, Israel may be forced to take more serious action. The description of Israel's response to the attacks as “disproportionate” is misleading and is used by some to delegitimize Israel's right to defend its citizens from daily, indiscriminate rocket attacks.

Protecting civilians' well-being includes, as Franklin Roosevelt once told us, “freedom from fear.” Like any sovereign nation, Israel has the right an obligation to take defensive measures to protect civilians. ■