

APRIL 12, 2010

Parashat Tazria-Metzora

International Lashon Hara

Adam ki yihiye b'or bsaro – “When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh” (Leviticus 13:2)

Drawing on the *tzara'at* which afflicted Miriam following her slanderous speech against Moses, Jewish tradition has long associated the *tzara'at* described in Tazria and Metzora with *lashon hara* (see Rashi on 13:46). Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, in his epic work *Chafetz Chaim*, described a unique type of *lashon hara*: “And know that just as...the Torah prohibits believing falsehoods told about friends, the [prohibition] also applies even if one knows that the things he told him were true, yet they can be interpreted either positively or negatively, and the speaker judges [them] negatively... [The listener who] agrees with the negative portrayal—not only does he violate, ‘and you shall judge your fellow favorably’ (Leviticus 19:15); he is also included among those who ‘accept and agree with slander’” (Laws of Lashon Hara 6:7). Thus, Rabbi Kagan reminds us that telling limited truths in order to paint a negative picture falls into the category of harmful and slanderous speech.

Today, Israel finds itself a victim of this very type of *lashon hara*. In fact, many are guilty of using partial facts and limited information to paint Israel in a negative light—seeking to delegitimize Israel in the eyes of the world.

Following the release of the Goldstone report, Israel finds itself the target of ongoing attempts to demonize the Jewish state. The report is part of a long series of biased, one-sided actions taken by the United Nations Human Rights Council, which already has passed 27 anti-Israel resolutions out of 34 motions to censure countries since the Council's inception in June 2006. In order to counter this trend, presenters at the recent Herzliya Conference discussed various options that Israel could consider in order to win a propaganda war against those who “want to turn the Jewish state into an international pariah,” Reuters reports. According to former Israeli government adviser Eyal Arad, “People are questioning whether we should exist... What we need is a global political campaign.” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed the gravity of these efforts, stating that he considers the “Goldstone effect,” defined by the *New York Times* as the “delegitimization of Israel abroad,” to be a major strategic threat.

As Americans, we can play a vital role in combating the spread of the “Goldstone effect.” We must set the record straight, explaining to our friends, family and elected officials that Israel seeks peace, that her actions in Gaza were consistent with international law and that, in the words of Retired British Colonel Richard Kemp, “The IDF [Israel Defense Force] did more to safeguard civilians than any other army.” For more on the Goldstone report, click [here](#).

Arming ourselves with information will enable us to counter false accusations and correct misleading facts. While the “Goldstone effect” poses a real threat to Israel's stability and security, it also presents a critical opportunity for us to help the Jewish state. In doing so, we will be fighting against a dangerous form of *lashon hara* as well. ■

Isolating Behavior

Badad yeishev – “Alone he shall sit” (Leviticus 13:46)

Why were the Israelites commanded to remove those with *tzara'at* from the camp? Chizkuni (on 13:46) viewed the instruction practically: because they were impure, removing people with *tzara'at* protected others from defilement.

However, Ibn Ezra (on 13:45) disagreed, stating that the removal of those with *tzara'at* was punitive. Accordingly, a person with *tzara'at* was ostracized “so that he will mourn his evil behavior, for his affliction came due to his sinful actions.” The Talmud (Erchin 16b) adds that “he [the person with *tzara'at*] divided between husband and wife, between a man and his neighbor—therefore the Torah said, ‘He shall sit alone.’” According to this view, negative behavior requires isolation in order to cause a review of one’s behavior and an opportunity to change ways.

Just as a person with *tzara'at* was isolated so that they could recognize the error of their ways and change course, the international community must isolate Iran with further sanctions designed to convince Tehran to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Recently, a number of international firms have ceased doing business with Iran. Although energy-hungry Asian countries are the main buyers of Iranian oil, in recent months they have shifted away from the Islamic Republic because they fear the imposition of additional sanctions. In fact, India’s largest private refiner, Reliance Industries, announced that it will not renew a contract to import oil from Iran. Japan’s Iranian crude imports are also declining this year, while China, the world’s second largest consumer of oil, cut its crude imports from Iran by nearly 40% in the first two months of 2010. Additionally, Russian oil giant Lukoil stated that it will stop supplying gasoline to Iran, and KPMG, the global professional services provider, severed its links with its Iranian member firm—citing “serious and escalating concerns” about Iran’s conduct. With the threat of sanctions already having a dramatic impact on companies doing business with the Islamic Republic, additional sanctions should be implemented to further isolate Iran and convince it to abandon its nuclear weapons program. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

The Torah commands us to isolate those with *tzara'at* to encourage their repentance. While the threat of additional sanctions on Iran is already having an impact, the implementation of such sanctions would further isolate Tehran and could give it the incentive to “mourn its evil behavior” and abandon its dangerous and destabilizing efforts. ■

The Power of Preparation

V'tzivah hakohen u'pinu et habayit – “And the priest commanded that they empty the house” (Leviticus 14:36)

Tzara'at did not only afflict people, but sometimes it appeared on the walls of a home as well. The Torah, in describing the process of a priest diagnosing such *tzara'at*, states that the owner of a house with *tzara'at* must “Empty the house, before the priest goes in to see the plague” (14:36). Why were the owner’s possessions removed from the home? Rashi (on 14:36) explained that until the priest actually declared the home impure, the home and its contents remained ritually pure. For this reason, the priest instructed the owner of the home to be prepared for the worst and take steps to minimize the damage to his property, “that all that is in the house be not made unclean.”

Through this simple instruction, the Torah reminds us of the value of preparation. By adhering to this principle today, Israel was able to send a remarkably efficient rescue team to Haiti following January’s tragic earthquake.

The lifesaving achievements of the Israeli medical team in Haiti have brought much well-deserved praise to the Jewish state. How was it that Israel, a small country of relatively modest means, provided the only functioning medical team during the critical first week after the earthquake? Dr. Ofer Merin, Chief of the Israel Defense Force field hospital in Haiti, described how Israel responded. Only hours after the quake struck, three doctors were sent ahead to reconnaissance a site and found a soccer field. To save time, the entire operation was planned in the air during the 14 hour flight from Israel. Less than 80 hours after the quake, the hospital was set up and fully operational. According to Dr. Merin, “We were the only group to set up like a real hospital, complete with a surgical wing.” Dr. Merin credited Israel’s quick response and extraordinary organization to their training in emergency preparedness, “We drill year after year so we have the mentality to be alert.” For more on Israel’s efforts in Haiti, click [here](#).

While the priest’s preparations were meant only to save the property in the affected home, Israel’s commitment to ongoing preparedness has helped save lives not only in the Jewish state, but in Haiti and around the world. ■