

APRIL 23, 2012

Parashat Tazria-Metzora

The Miracle of Birth (Yom Ha'atzmaut)

When a woman conceives (Leviticus 12:2)

אשה כי תזריע (ויקרא יב:ב)

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba Tazria 14) offers a beautiful parable about the miracle of life: “Said Rabbi Levi, in general custom, should a person secretly deposit with his friend a wallet filled with silver, and his friend returns to him a sizable portion of gold in public—should he not have a sense of appreciation? So [we must act towards] the Holy One, who accepts [from people] deposits of a drop of dust in private, and returns to them whole, praiseworthy souls in public. Is this not fit for praise? This is the meaning of the verse: ‘I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker (Job 36:3).’”

This metaphor brilliantly describes the miracle of life, and also aptly applies to the amazing growth of the state of Israel since its birth. On April 26, as we commemorate Israel’s independence day, we should keep this miracle in mind as we celebrate 64 years of the country’s achievements.

The religious yearning of Jews to return to their land ultimately spawned the political movement of Zionism in the 19th century. In 1947, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into two states—one Arab and one Jewish. Even though more than half of the area allocated for the Jewish nation was desert, the Jewish community in Palestine immediately accepted the compromise. The Arabs rejected the plan, and five Arab armies invaded Israel, openly seeking to abort the creation of Israel. Yet, despite hostility from its neighbors, a vast desert terrain and a unique demographic make-up, since its establishment in May 1948 Israel has developed into an internationally recognized world leader—demonstrating expertise in technology, medicine and agriculture. The “little state that could” has become a nation of limitless progress and a beacon of ingenuity that, in a little over six decades, has already become a member of the exclusive Organization for Economic Cooperation and developed hundreds of companies listed on NASDAQ. Today, its expertise, technology, humanitarian assistance and defense strategies are utilized by countries on every continent. For more on Israel’s significance, click [here](#).

Like the miracle of birth which starts from a tiny seed and creates a beautiful child, the small country born a little more than six decades ago has blossomed into a miraculous, beautiful, vibrant success. ■

A Temporary Reprieve

Then the priest confine him (Leviticus 13:4)

והסגיר הכהן את הנגע (ויקרא יג:ד)

The text describes numerous instances where a blemish might constitute *tzara’at*. In these cases, “the priest shall confine him that has the plague seven days” (13:4. See also 13:5 and 13:21) after which, the priest must return to reexamine the blemish. Sefer Hachinuch (commandment 168) explains that *tzara’at* emanates from sinful activity and this seven day confinement offers the sinner an opportunity to reexamine their behavior and change their ways. “He should immediately consider that his sins [caused his suffering]...and through analysis of his actions the blemish will be removed from him.” Should the afflicted follow this path, the blemish would heal during the confinement period. Yet, if the *metzora* failed to use this week to take responsibility for their sinful conduct, the punishment would harshen and the blemish would develop into full-blown *tzara’at*.

Just as the seven day period of confinement gave a potential leper a chance to change course to avoid further estrangement from the community, current international talks are giving Iran a similar opportunity to pause and reconsider its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Representatives of the P5+1 (the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China and Germany) recently met with Iranian leaders regarding the country's nuclear program, with the parties agreeing to meet again on May 23. While Western officials acknowledged that they didn't press Iran to take any specific actions to curb its nuclear program during the first round of talks, leading U.S. lawmakers [pledged](#) to intensify sanctions on Tehran if it doesn't immediately abide by U.N. resolutions calling for it to freeze its enrichment of uranium. President Barack Obama also has said that there would be more sanctions imposed on Iran if there is no breakthrough in nuclear talks in the coming months, [Reuters](#) reported. Obama further [said](#) that negotiations with Iran would not stretch on indefinitely and would require Iran to act. "Now, the clock is ticking and I've been very clear to Iran and to our negotiating partners that we're not going to have these talks just drag out in a stalling process," Obama said. The P5+1 must continue to insist that Iran stop its uranium enrichment to the 20 percent level, export all of its existing 20 percent enriched uranium and halt work at the underground Fordo nuclear facility. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Like a possible leper who had limited time to change course, the clock ticks as Iran must use the coming weeks to comply with the demands of the international community and abandon its nuclear weapons ambitions. ■

The Danger of Slander

This is the law of the leper (Leviticus 14:2)

זאת תהיה תורת המצרע (ויקרא יד:ב)

The Sages drew a direct connection between *tzara'at* and the spreading of slander. According to the Talmud Erchin, "Said Rabbi Yossi ben Zimra, 'Anyone who speaks *lashon hara* is afflicted with *tzara'at*...' (Talmud Erchin 15b)." Moreover, the severity of the affliction highlights the seriousness of the sin of slander and its devastating results. Maimonides (Laws of Attitudes, 7:1) adds, "It is a terrible sin that causes the deaths of many souls of Israel." For this reason, the commandment "You shall not stand aside while your fellow's blood is shed" is found in the same verse as the injunction, "You shall not be a gossipmonger among your people" (19:16).

In connecting *tzara'at* to the sin of *lashon hara*, the Sages highlighted the dangerous, destructive power of slander. We must take these dangers seriously as Israel is attacked with slander and lies with the goal of delegitimizing the Jewish state's very right to exist.

Recently, hundreds of anti-Israel activists attempted to land at Ben Gurion Airport as part of an initiative to delegitimize Israel, [The Times of Israel](#) reported. Environment Minister Gilad Erdan said that "these are not peace activists, they are anti-Israel and anti-Semites. They are against the existence of Israel and want to draw attention to that by international actions..." The recent protest was an example of the ongoing campaign to portray the Jewish state as an outcast and an alien presence in the community of nations. Without pointing guns at it, this strategy attacks the state of Israel with slander and lies designed to isolate and undermine its claim to the first and most fundamental right of self-preservation—Israel's very right to exist. Danny Danon, Deputy Speaker of the Knesset [wrote](#) that "The state of Israel is at war. This war is being fought on a completely different battlefield than in the past, one in which the word delegitimization has replaced bullets and provocative actions such as the flotilla have replaced tanks and fighter planes... While the 'delegitimization battle' may be sometimes confusing and seem less dangerous than actual acts of war, the implications of capitulation will be just as dire for Israel's future..."

The fact that *tzara'at* specifically afflicted a person who spoke *lashon hara* highlights the true danger of slanderous speech and emphasizes its devastating results. As the Jewish state faces a concerted campaign of slander and delegitimization, we must vocalize our support of the only true liberal democracy in the region, Israel. ■

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