



# Sermon Tidbits

APRIL 8, 2013

## Parashat Tazria-Metzora & Yom Ha'atzmaut

### A Perilous Process

The plague of *tzara'at* (Leviticus 13:1)

נגע צרעת (ויקרא יג:א)

The Sages taught that sinful behavior resulted in the plague of *tzara'at*. Rabbi Shalom Meir Wolk (see Ma'ayan Hashavua vol. 3 p. 178) explains that one did not suddenly emerge with a full-blown case of the disease. Rather, infection came in stages. "First [one was afflicted] with a wound (see 13:18) or a burn (13:18). Then, after time passed the wound congealed...and under the scab was skin afflicted with *tzara'at*... Know that even spiritual afflictions do not land suddenly like tidal waves...They begin with a wound or a burn, and it seems as if nothing has happened... Yet, underneath the scab the poison accumulates—and the affliction develops."

*Tzara'at* reminds us that the most destructive forces never emerge suddenly, but instead develop slowly over time, hidden from view. This is precisely the model Iran has followed in developing its nuclear weapons program.

The [Associated Press](#) recently reported that according to International Atomic Energy Agency's head Yukiya Amano, "Iran may be secretly continuing work on nuclear weapons while his agency is tied up in protracted negotiations." Yet, this is anything but breaking news. For more than 25 years Iran has pursued a path to a nuclear weapons capability, constructing a secret program in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty focusing its nuclear efforts on enriching uranium, a key step in producing fissile material for the core of a nuclear weapon. Since the early 1990s the U.S. has imposed escalating rounds of sanctions, first focusing on preventing the transfer to Iran of components that might be used in its nuclear or ballistic missile programs, and later focusing directly on Iran's ability to conduct international business and generate revenue from its vast energy resources. Since 2007 the U.S. has also worked with the U.N. Security Council to pass four sets of increasingly tough sanctions on Iran, measures that target Iranian entities involved in Tehran's nuclear, missile and conventional weapons programs. Despite the biting sanctions that have severely impaired Iran's economy, the Islamic regime defiantly refuses to halt its nuclear enrichment program, and has instead dramatically increased enrichment activity. As of November 2012, Iran had produced nearly 17,000 pounds of low-enriched uranium (LEU). If further enriched to a weapons-grade level, the uranium would be enough to produce six to seven nuclear weapons. For more on Iran, visit [www.aipac.org/Iran](http://www.aipac.org/Iran).

Like *tzara'at*, which developed over time, the threat of a nuclear Iran did not emerge overnight. For decades, the world has watched the Islamic regime defiantly refuse to halt its nuclear enrichment program. We must continue to increase pressure in order to prevent Iran from achieving a nuclear weapons capability. ■

### Positive Speech

He shall be brought unto Aaron the priest (Leviticus 13:2)

והובא אל אהרן הכהן (ויקרא יג:ב)

Why must a person afflicted with *tzara'at* be brought specifically to the priest? Rabbi Chaim Vital (in his work Etz Hada'at V'hatov) explains that one cause for *tzara'at* was slanderous speech, a sin that caused discord and interpersonal strife. Therefore, the afflicted person was sent to the high priest Aaron, who was known for his quality of "loving peace and seeking peace" (see Avot 1:12). Aaron could teach the slanderous speaker to change his ways, improve, and instead of using words that cause strife, increase cordiality by speaking words of peace.

The individual with *tzara'at* was sent specifically to Aaron to remind us that just as negative, divisive speech has the power to destroy, constructive speech can build bridges and lead to true, meaningful peace.

During President Barack Obama's recent visit to Israel, he reiterated both the United States' and Israel's longstanding position that the best and only path to a meaningful peace agreement is by direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, without preconditions. According to [The Guardian](#), Obama said at a press conference in Ramallah, "What I shared with President Abbas is that if the expectation is that we can only have direct negotiations when everything is settled ahead of time then there is no point for negotiations...the only way to achieve that goal is by direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis themselves...It's important for us to work through this process even if there are irritants on both sides." While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed appreciation for the president's views and reiterated his readiness to sit down with the Palestinians anytime and anywhere to reach a two-state agreement, a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas [said](#) the Palestinian president had told Obama preconditions remained in place. "Abbas, during his meeting with Obama, was very clear, telling him that settlement construction was an obstacle on the path to peace and to the resumption of talks, and that this was not possible without a settlement freeze." For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Aaron began the healing process from *tzara'at* by teaching the afflicted person to halt his harmful speech, and use his words to build bonds of peace. Today, the world must encourage the Palestinian Authority to follow Aaron's example and engage Israel in meaningful negotiations that will bring lasting peace to the region. ■

## A New Fruit of the Land (Yom Ha'atzmaut)

**And yield your fruit to My people Israel (Ezekiel 36:8)**

**ופריכם תשאו לעמי ישראל (יהזקאל לו:ח)**

"Said Rabbi Abba: There is no greater sign of the redemption than [the fulfillment of] this [verse]: 'But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit to My people Israel; for they are at hand to come'" (Talmud Sanhedrin 98a). Explaining this unusual passage, Rabbi Yissachar Dov Teichtal wrote (see Eim Habanim Semeichah p. 132) that throughout the centuries of exile, "the mountains and valleys [of Israel] remained desolate..." Only when the time would come for the Jewish people to return to their land would the Holy Land once again yield her fruit. Rav Teichtal added that for this reason, in the daily Amidah, the Sages placed the blessing asking for sustenance immediately before the blessing for the ingathering of the exiles.

While many associate the Talmud's prediction regarding the fruit of the Land of Israel with Israel's agricultural success, perhaps the Jewish state recently reaped a new "fruit" of the land—important for Israel's economic future.

Israel recently moved closer to its goal of energy independence as natural gas from a large offshore field called the Tamar reservoir in the Mediterranean Sea began flowing into a terminal in the Israeli port of Ashdod, a harbinger of important change that will benefit the country strategically and economically. The development of Israel's natural gas sector in recent years has lessened the country's dependence on foreign energy imports in an unstable and largely hostile region. A partnership of Noble Energy, based in Houston, and two Israeli companies, Delek Group and Dor Gas Explorations, discovered large gas reserves in the Tamar field in 2009. Israel's Ministry of Energy and Water Resources says that the Tamar field will supply 50 to 80 percent of Israel's natural gas needs over the next 10 years. According to [The Washington Post](#), "The new gas finds are expected to supply Israel's domestic needs for decades and could transform the country into an energy exporter." About 40 percent of electricity in Israel has been generated from natural gas in recent years, and the rate of natural gas consumption is expected to rise to 50 percent by 2015.

The Talmud predicted that the blossoming of the Land of Israel would represent a clear signal of the Jewish nation's return to its Land. Maybe, the fruits of the Land of Israel are not only beautiful oranges and peppers, but a plentiful supply of natural gas as well. ■

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