

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

TAZRIA-MESORA

Haftarah: Melachim II 7:3-20

APRIL 20-21, 2018 6 IYAR 5778

DEDICATION: In memory of Farha Aziza Bibi - 10 Iyar

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
 Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

Daily Minyan MINCHA - Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue,
 17th Floor, Artistic Frame – 4:00PM – Please join us! 212-289-
 2100 – Mincha– The most important tefilah of the day –Give us
 11 minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!

EDITORS NOTES

The Torah tells us that at the age of 120, Moses still had perfect vision and could leap tall buildings in a single bound. Why is it important for us to know that Moses at his death needed no reading glasses to see nor cane to walk?

In our class this week we examined the phenomenon of Sara-at, the skin disease of leprosy which seems to be more spiritually related than physical. The vast majority of the two portions we read Tazria and Mesorah focus on this malady. We examined the Haftarah typically read for Tazria which tells the story of the Syrian General Naaman and his quest for a cure for sara-at and his healing through the advice of Elisha. More than the transformation of his skin, we see the transformation of his soul. He is an arrogant, proud and haughty individual who as the chapter ends becomes the example of humility. The Haftara for Mesorah tells of the former servant of Elisha and his children who have been punished with this sara-at for their selfishness, their self-important and conceited behavior. Yet it is through their actions that the city of Shomron is saved from an unimaginable famine. How? It appears that when they see themselves as already dead and as no longer among the living, they shed whatever pride they held. The haftarot seem to tell us that this sara-at is a sin of pride. I suggest you study both chapters of the Navi to see these amazing stories inside.

The Talmud tells us that when Alexander came to the rabbis, he asked them ten questions. Two of which are as follows:

Question #7: What should one do in order to live?

Answer (Chachamim): He should kill himself.

What should one do in order to die?

Answer (Chachamim): He should live - aggrandize himself.

Rabbi Aderet would often say based on this:

Haroseh lamut yichyeh – He who wishes to die should live
 And Haroseh lichyot yamut – He who wishes to live should die,

What a strange answer.

The rabbis explain that in order to live he should play dead, He should lower himself. And what causes death, what who aggrandizes himself bringing envy and Ayin Ra'ah. Ninety nine out of 100 in the cemetery have died because of this.

I heard an explanation in the name of the Arizal. Kelipot, disease and sickness come to a person through pride, while humility is man's greatest protection. He explains that we are told of the health of Moses at his death to understand that Moses who is called by G-d, the most humble, was protected through his humility.

We see that the death of Nadav and Avihu is told to us in parshat Shemini and then next week we will read Acharei Mot which begins with the words, after the death of these two son of Aaron. Sandwiched between are all these verses on sara-at. Is there a connection?

The Midrash tells us that they died because, "They did not have wives [because] they were arrogant. Many women remained unmarried, waiting for them, [but] they said, "Our father's brother [Moses] is a king, our mother's brother [Nachshon] is prince [of his Tribe], our father [Aharon] is Kohen Gadol [high priest], and we are assistants of Kohen Gadol. What women are suitable for us?"

The Torah tells us that they brought Esh Zarah, a strange fire. And as we discussed previously even if they thought they should bring a fire or the wood for the fire, they should have asked, but thought they knew better. And still another suggestion is that they asked each other, "When will these two old men die, so that we can take over"? Each explanation points to a haughtiness and pride.

Rabbeynu Ha Ari explains in Shaar HaGilgulim that the souls of Nadav and Avihu came from a very high level of Adam, they encompass the level of his Nefesh of Atzilut. They are in essence a reincarnation of this high level of Adam and are perhaps the holiest

of their time. But Adam sinned. And when he did Hashem gave him an opportunity, an exit strategy and a way back. Admit, repent and be forgiven is the formula. Yet Adam did not. He suffered from pride and could not admit. Nadav and Avihu repeat the same sin, a byproduct of their pride.

How far does one need to go to work on their pride? The example is there for all of us in Moshe Rabbeynu.

I want to close with a strange story, but given the source, we should all heed. Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz writes in the introduction to his own sefer Kereisei Uplesei, that his grandfather, Rabbi Nathan Neta Spira who lived in Poland (1585–1633) the Megaleh Amukot, was the peh shelishi to Maran the Arizal. He means that his grandfather was a student of Rav Yisrael Serug z'sl, who was himself a student of the Arizal. The Megaleh Amukot mentions Rav Serug several times in his sefer.

He tells the story which depicts the extraordinary humility of R' Nossan Neta. It happened while the Rabbeynu Yoel ben Samuel Sirkis also known as the Bach whose commentary on the Shulchan Aruch is part of our daily life, served as the chief rabbi of Cracow. The Bach was walking down the street when he noticed two other people walking slowly. The faces of the two were radiant like the blazing sun in the afternoon. He saw four people running after them whose faces were as coal like as "the bottom of a pot." The four were chasing the two, but never caught up to them.

The Bach went up to those with the black faces, greeted them, and asked who they were. They refused to answer. The Bach then said sternly: "I am the rabbi of the city and I decree upon you to immediately answer my question."

The four could not refuse the Saddik's explicit command: "We are Geichazi and his three sons!"

"And who are the two people you were running after?" asked the Bach.

"They are Eliyahu and Elisha. This is our punishment. We must always run after Elisha but we can never catch him."

"Where did they go?" the Bach then asked.

"They were on their way to see the Megaleh Amukot," they answered.

The Bach hurried to the house of the Megaleh Amukot and told him: "I know for sure that Eliyahu Hanavi is in your house. Ask him why he doesn't come to me?"

The Megaleh Amukot asked Eliyahu this question, and Eliyahu answered: "The Chief Rabbi of a city in these times must have some pride (ga'avah), since if he completely lacked pride the baalei batim – the congregants - would gain control over him. Nonetheless, I cannot come to him because of even that small amount of pride!"

I was told that the Ramban and then later saw from the Chida that as soon as Shabbat ends we are attached by the dark forces. The Ramban suggested we read eight verses, the Chida expnded it to eleven verses. Each begins with the letter nun and ends with the letter nun. Each seems to work on our pride, to lower us and to protect us. I wonder if Naaman was the real name of the Syrian general. Perhaps it was changed when he went from Naaman the proud to Naaman the humble. Perhaps in his humility he became Ne'emán – faithful. Perhaps his name beginning with the nun and ending with the nun is our reminder, to be nofel, to sometimes fall, to lower ourselves and hide and in doing that be protected.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Tazria - Laws of Identifying Tsaraat

- 1- Tumah by a women who gives birth, Identifying Tsaraat on the skin known as baheret
- 2- Identifying tsaraat on the skin known as Seit
- 3- Shechin- Tsarat resulting from a blow
- 4- Michvat Esh- Tsarat resulting from a burn
- 5- Netek- One who has tsaraat on a place of hair (i.e., head or beard)
- 6- Laws of tsaraat on one's clothes - what qualifies as tsaraat
- 7- Laws of tsaraat on one's clothes - how one purifies himself

Metsora - Laws of purification from tsaraat (and other tumah)

- 1- Purification process of one who has tsaraat - includes the ingredients involved in the korban
- 2- Purification process of one who has tsaraat - korban, sprinkling blood and oil on the mesorah

- 3- The purification process / korban for a mesorah who cannot afford a standard korban
- 4- Identifying tsaraat on the house, Purification from tsaraat on the house
- 5- Halachot regarding a zav
- 6- Halachot regarding a baal keri, regarding nidah by a woman, and regarding a zava
- 7- Purification process of a zava

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

“This shall be the law of the mesora.” (Vayikra 14:2)

What is the sin that causes a person to get sara'at? Hazal teach us that it is the sin of lashon hara, speaking badly about others. Now you may ask: Is lashon hara really such a terrible sin? After all, it's just talking. You're not actually doing anything. Why does this sin get such a harsh punishment?

Let's imagine a science teacher teaching about atomic energy. He begins by explaining that the atom is so small that you actually cannot see it. Scientists know how to split them into smaller parts. When that happens, energy is released. So you might think that these atoms are so small, how much energy can there be? The problem is that when an atom is split in two, a part bumps into the atoms next to it. That makes those atoms split in two also. This continues to form a chain reaction that can cause a tremendous explosion.

Now we can understand how words can destroy. If you tell someone something bad about another person, he may not like that person any more. He may not want to do business with him either. And he might tell other people about this bad thing, who will then tell others. It's like a chain reaction! Before you know it, nobody will like that person. He will be all alone, and his life will be ruined. All from just a few words.

But keep in mind that nuclear power also has a tremendous potential for good. It can be used to turn on lights and power our cities. The same is true about our words. We can do tremendous good by the things we say. We can say a kind word. We can comfort someone who is sad. We can make a person know he has friends. We can teach Torah. We can encourage people to keep the misvot.

Always remember: the words we speak have the power to “light up the world.” Rabbi Reuven Semah

Our two parashiyot this week discuss the many intricate details regarding a person who gets the disease called sara'at, and his method of purifying himself. Our Sages teach that the primary cause for this disease is the speaking of lashon hara.

One of the steps for his purification is that he must shave off all of his hair. What is the reason for this?

The Gemara (Baba Batra) says that each hair has its own pore from which it grows and is nourished, and no two hairs grow from the same pore. Based on this, the Ben Ish Hai explains that when the mesora shaves off his hair, he contemplates this fact that each hair is sustained independently of every other hair, and that no hair takes away nourishment from any other hair. By the same token, he realizes that no person can take away any parnasah (sustenance) that is destined for any other person. This will prevent him from feeling jealousy towards others. Even if someone else has more money, honor or success than he does, he will understand that this was destined specifically for that person, and if he himself doesn't have it, then it clearly was not destined for him. When someone is jealous of his fellow man, he is much more inclined to speak lashon hara about him. So the Torah requires the mesora to shave off all of his hair in order to help him overcome his jealousy, so that he will not longer speak improperly about others.

The Hafetz Hayim says that although we do not have the actual disease of sara'at nowadays, it does manifest itself on the person's soul, and it will sometimes cause poverty. (Of course, this doesn't imply that every person who is poor is guilty of speaking lashon hara). This fits in nicely with what we said above. Since the person failed to realize that Hashem provides for each person independently, and he proceeded to slander another person, his own sustenance is damaged. Let's take this message to heart, and recognize Hashem's direct involvement in every aspect of our daily lives. This will help us overcome any feelings of jealousy, and will help us to live together in peace and harmony. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

“Fulfill His will as you would your own will” (Abot 2:4)

The word “kiresonecha - as your own will” is superfluous; why doesn't he simply say, “Do His will?”

The message in this Mishnah is indeed much more profound than just calling on man to do the will of Hashem. The money we spend during our lifetime can be divided into two portions: Some goes to spiritual matters such as sedakah, misvot, and tuition, and the other goes for physical necessities and personal pleasures. In retrospect, we usually see that money spent on pleasures has been wasted. However, the return for money spent on the spiritual is everlasting.

Unfortunately, many people who are blessed with affluence spend freely on personal amenities, yet plead poverty when it comes to spending money

on spiritual matters. The Mishnah is advising that a person should fulfill His will as he would his own will, i.e., an equal amount of money should be spent on spiritual matters as on physical ones. If one has money to “throw over the cliff,” one should not plead poverty when it comes to spending for Hashem. (Vedibarta Bam)

Sound Effects

“When we talk we make sound waves that travel in the air until finally they hit the eardrum of the listener. The eardrum is specially constructed to accept those sounds and convert them into electrical impulses that are sent to the brain. The brain registers the sound and makes sense of them.”

As we study the miracle of sound, we can appreciate this wonderful gift from Hashem. This appreciation can cause one to exercise caution and use this gift properly. (Norman D. Levy, Based on Rabbi Miller’s Duties of the Mind)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com
Looking Out for Today’s Mesora

Parashat Tazria deals mainly with the subject of Sara’at, a type of skin disease that in ancient times would affect people who were guilty of certain sins. Sara’at was manifested in the form of discolorations on the skin, and when a suspicious discoloration appeared, the individual would be brought by his family or friends to a Kohen, who would examine the skin and determine whether the discoloration indeed constituted Sara’at. If the individual was determined to have been stricken with Sara’at, he would have to reside outside his city until the skin returned to its normal color.

One of the concepts underlying this law of Sara’at is the reality that most people are reluctant to acknowledge their problems. When a person would notice a mysterious discoloration, he would likely dismiss it as a temporary medical condition, perhaps eczema, some kind of virus or allergic reaction. The last thing he would think of is that he is being punished by G-d for sins he committed, such as Lashon Ha’ra and arrogance. For this reason, the people around him are instructed to bring him to a Kohen for a “diagnosis.” Given our innate reluctance to recognize our own flaws and behavior problems, the people around the Mesora (the person stricken with Sara’at) bore the responsibility of bringing him to the Kohen to initiate the process of atonement.

The laws of Sara’at do not apply nowadays, as this supernatural punishment no longer occurs. Still, the

basic concept underlying this process applies as much today as it did in ancient times. The Mesora’im of today are those suffering from addictions or other types of self-destructive behaviors and tendencies. Unfortunately – and let us not delude ourselves into thinking otherwise – there are many people in our community who are ruining their lives and their families through harmful habits and behavior patterns. As in the case of the Mesora, these people generally respond to their problems with insistent denial. More often than not, people with addictions deny that they have a problem and thus refuse to seek the help they so desperately need. This is the normal and natural reaction to such situations, and this is what makes these situations so dangerous and so difficult to handle. The responsibility therefore falls upon the people around the suffering victims – family members, friends, the Rabbi, and the community at large – to get involved. Just as the Mesora’s family members and peers would bring him to the Kohen for guidance, we, too, must take the initiative to help those who need help but refuse to initiate the process. We must look out for the “Mesora’im” in our midst to ensure they receive the assistance, support and guidance they need to overcome their problem and resume normal, healthy, productive lives.

Even if the law of Sara’at does not apply nowadays, the fundamental message of communal responsibility most certainly does.

VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

**Will be distributed under a separate list
If you want to receive this article every week,
please let us know and we will add you to that list**

Rabbi Wein

The human body is subject to all sorts of pressures that affect its health and well-being. Modern medicine has shown how mental moods, stress and psychic disturbances can adversely affect physical health and appearance. As modern technology has exploded in our time, in spite of all of its advantages, and there are many, our lives have become more stressful...and unfortunately psychological disorders abound.

This is especially true here in Israel where the stress level is always high and the pressure of being part of the actual rebuilding process of the Jewish people is felt daily and in myriad ways. To this empiric lesson of societal life, the Torah adds another dimension of activity, which can and did have physical effects at the beginning of our history as a nation.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Power of Praise

The plagues that are described in this week's Torah reading and their physical manifestations defy any easy and rational explanation. The rabbis of the Talmud ascribed these ills as being caused by slanderous speech and evil social behavior. Just as driving in traffic – especially Jerusalem traffic these days – will raise one's blood pressure significantly, so to, speaking ill of other people also has a physical manifestation and not only a spiritual sin attached to it.

The Torah spends a great deal of space and detail to outline this physical manifestation and the necessity for purification of the body and the mind, in order to arrest and cure the disease. I do not know how this physical and spiritual connection does occur, but I do not know why mental stress and traffic jams should raise one's blood pressure either. Apparently, our Creator has wired us so that this is the case. And, so it is with the disease and plagues described in this week's Torah reading.

The priest who was involved in the diagnosis and healing process for this plague is not seen or described as a medical expert. He is rather what we would call today a mental therapist, a spiritual and psychological guide who becomes God's agent to lift the diseased person out of his misery. There is a period of isolation and quarantine that becomes part of the process of healing. This is to allow for the introspection and self-analysis that is a necessary component of all psychological and mental healing.

A disease that is caused by spiritual failure as much as by physical malfunction must be cured by repairing the spiritual breach that originally caused it. And that can be accomplished only by a realistic and honest appraisal of one's self... of one's spiritual strengths and weaknesses. Because of this truth, it is the spiritual priest, the descendant of Aaron, who becomes the key catalyst in the process of recovery and rehabilitation.

The Torah is the true practitioner of holistic medicine. It aims to cure not only the mind or the body but rather the soul and the spirit of the human being as well. And this is an important lesson for all of us even in our time. The plague described in this week's Torah reading may not actually be identifiable to us, but its moral lesson and spiritual value remains eternal and constructive in our time as well

From time to time couples come to see me before their wedding. Sometimes they ask me whether I have any advice to give them as to how to make their marriage strong. In reply I give them a simple suggestion. It is almost magical in its effects. It will make their relationship strong and in other unexpected ways it will transform their lives.

They have to commit themselves to the following ritual. Once a day, usually at the end of the day, they must each praise the other for something the other has done that day, no matter how small: an act, a word, a gesture that was kind or sensitive or generous or thoughtful. The praise must be focused on that one act, not generalised. It must be genuine: it must come from the heart. And the other must learn to accept the praise.

That is all they have to do. It takes at most a minute or two. But it has to be done, not sometimes, but every day. I learned this in a most unexpected way.

I have written before about the late Lena Rustin: one of the most remarkable people I have ever met. She was a speech therapist specialising in helping stammering children. She founded the Michael Palin Centre for Stammering in London, and she had a unique approach to her work. Most speech therapists focus on speaking and breathing techniques, and on the individual child (those she worked with were on average around five years old). Lena did more. She focused on relationships, and worked with parents, not just children.

Her view was that to cure a stammer, she had to do more than help the child to speak fluently. She had to change the entire family environment. Families tend to create an equilibrium. If a child stammers, everyone in the family adjusts to it. Therefore if the child is to lose its stammer, all the relationships within the family will have to be renegotiated. Not only must the child change. So must everyone else.

But change at that basic level is hard. We tend to settle into patterns of behaviour until they become comfortable like a well-worn armchair. How do you create an atmosphere within a family that encourages change and makes it unthreatening? The answer, Lena discovered, was praise. She told the families with which she was working that every day they must catch each member of the family doing something right, and say so, specifically, positively and sincerely. Every member of the family, but especially the parents, had to learn to give and receive praise.

Watching her at work I began to realise that she was creating, within each home, an atmosphere of mutual respect and continuous positive reinforcement. She believed that this would generate self-confidence not just for the stammering child but for all members of the family. The result would be an environment in which people felt safe to change and to help others do so likewise.

I filmed Lena's work for a documentary I made for BBC television on the state of the family in Britain. I also interviewed some of the parents whose children she had worked with. When I asked them whether Lena had helped their child, not only did each of them say 'Yes' but they went on to say that she had helped save their marriage. This was extraordinary. She was, after all, not a marriage guidance counsellor but a speech therapist. Yet so powerful was this one simple ritual that it had massive beneficial side effects, one of which was to transform the relationship between husbands and wives.

I mention this for two reasons, one obvious, the other less so. The obvious reason is that the sages were puzzled about the major theme of Tazria-Metzora, the skin disease known as tsaraat. Why, they wondered, should the Torah focus at such length on such a condition? It is, after all, not a book of medicine, but of law, morality and spirituality.

The answer they gave was that tsaraat was a punishment for lashon hara: evil, hateful or derogatory speech. They cited the case of Miriam who spoke negatively about her brother Moses and was struck by tsaraat for seven days (Num. 12). They also pointed to the incident when at the burning bush Moses spoke negatively about the Israelites and his hand was briefly affected by tsaraat (Ex. 4:1-7).

The sages spoke more dramatically about lashon hara than any other offence. They said that it was as bad as committing all three cardinal sins: idolatry, incest and murder. They said that it kills three people: the one who says it, the one he says it about and the one who listens to it.[1] And in connection with Tazria-Metzora, they said that the punishment fitted the sin. One who speaks lashon hara creates dissension within the camp. Therefore his punishment as a metzora (a person stricken with tsaraat) was to be temporarily banished from the camp.[2]

So far, so clear. Don't gossip (Lev. 19:16). Don't slander. Don't speak badly about people. Judaism has a rigorous and detailed ethics of speech because it believes that "Life and death are in the power of the

tongue" (Prov. 18:21). Judaism is a religion of the ear more than the eye; of words rather than images. God created the natural world with words and we create or damage the social world with words. We do not say, "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never harm me." To the contrary, words can cause emotional injuries that are as painful as physical ones, perhaps more so.

So Lena Rustin's rule of praise is the opposite of lashon hara. It is lashon hatov: good, positive, encouraging speech. According to Maimonides, to speak in praise of people is part of the command to "love your neighbour as yourself." [3] That is straightforward.

But at a deeper level, there is a reason why it is hard to cure people of lashon hara, and harder still to cure them of gossip in general. The American sociologist Samuel Heilman wrote an incisive book, *Synagogue Life*, about a Modern Orthodox congregation of which, for some years, he was a member. [4] He devotes an entire lengthy chapter to synagogue gossip. Giving and receiving gossip, he says, is more or less constitutive of being part of the community. Not gossiping defines you as an outsider.

Gossip, he says, is part of "a tight system of obligatory exchange." The person who scorns gossip completely, declining to be either donor or recipient, at the very least "risks stigmatisation" and at the worst "excludes himself from a central activity of collective life and sociability." In short, gossip is the lifeblood of community.

Now, not only Heilman but probably every adult member of the community knew full well that gossip is biblically forbidden and that negative speech, lashon hara, is among the gravest of all sins. They also knew the damage caused by someone who gives more gossip than he or she receives. They used the Yiddish word for such a person: a yenta. Yet despite this, argued Heilman, the shul was in no small measure a system for the creation and distribution of gossip.

Synagogue Life was published 20 years before Oxford anthropologist Robin Dunbar's famous book, *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language*. [5] Dunbar's argument is that, in nature, groups are held together by devoting a considerable amount of time to building relationships and alliances. Non-human primates do this by "grooming," stroking and cleaning one another's skin (hence the expression, "If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours"). But this is very time-consuming and puts a limit on the size of the group.

Humans developed language as a more effective form of grooming. You can only stroke one animal or person at a time, but you can talk to several at a time. The specific form of language that bonds a group together, says Dunbar, is gossip – because this is the way members of the group can learn who to trust and who not to. So gossip is not one form of speech among others. According to Dunbar, it is the most primal of all uses of speech. It is why humans developed language in the first place. Heilman's account of synagogue life fits perfectly into this pattern. Gossip creates community, and community is impossible without gossip.

If this is so, it explains why the prohibitions against gossip and lashon hara are so often honoured in the breach, not the observance. So common is lashon hara that one of the giants of modern Jewry, R. Yisrael Meir ha-Cohen (the Chofetz Chaim) devoted much of his life to combatting it. Yet it persists, as anyone who has ever been part of a human group knows from personal experience. You can know it is wrong, yet you and others do it anyway.

This is why I found Lena Rustin's work to have such profound spiritual implications. Her work had nothing to do with gossip, but without intending to she had discovered one of the most powerful antidotes to lashon hara ever invented. She taught people to develop the habit of speaking well of one another. She taught them to praise, daily, specifically and sincerely. Anyone who uses Lena's technique for a prolonged period will be cured of lashon hara. It is the most effective antidote I know.

What is more, her technique transforms relationships and saves marriages. It heals what lashon hara harms. Evil speech destroys relationships. Good speech mends them. This works not only in marriages and families, but also in communities, organisations and businesses. So: in any relationship that matters to you, deliver praise daily. Seeing and praising the good in people makes them better people, makes you a better person, and strengthens the bond between you. This really is a life-changing idea.

[1] Maimonides, Hilkhot Deot 7:3.

[2] Arakhin 16b.

[3] Maimonides, Hilkhot Deot 6:3. Elsewhere I have dealt with the problem of the passage in Arakhin 16a that says that one should not speak in praise of others in case this leads others to disagree. For the different views of Rashi and Rambam on this, see *Covenant and Conversation, Leviticus: The Book of Holiness*, Maggid, 2015, 223-27.

[4] Samuel Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction*, University of Chicago Press, 1976, 151–192.

[5] Robin Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language*, London, Faber, 1997.

Rav Kook on the Perasha Man versus Mosquito

Why does the Torah discuss the laws of taharah (ritual purity) for humans only after teaching the analogous laws concerning animals, differentiating between those animals which may be eaten and those which are unclean? Should not humanity, the crown of creation, come first?

Third-century scholar Rabbi Simlai explained: "Just as mankind was created after all the animals... so too, the laws pertaining to mankind were given after the laws regarding animals." (Vayikra Rabbah 14:1)

In short, the order here in Leviticus parallels the account of Creation in Genesis. But is there a deeper significance to this order? The Midrash elaborates the lesson to be learned from this: "If one is deserving, he is told: 'You came before all of creation.' But if not, he is reminded: '[Even] the mosquito preceded you.'"

What sort of a contest is this, between man and mosquito?

Quantity versus Quality: We find in Psalms two nearly identical verses, but with small — and significant — differences:

"How many are Your works, God! The earth is full of Your creations." (Psalms 104:24)

"How great are Your works, God! Your thoughts are very profound." (Psalms 92:6)

What is the difference between these two similar verses? The first verse expresses our wonder at the variety and diversity of God's works. "How many are Your works!" The second verse expresses our amazement at their greatness and profundity. "How great are your works!" The first verse refers to quantity; the second, quality.

In other words, we may look at the world in two ways. We can be amazed by its detailed, multifaceted nature — its abundance of species and life forms, the remarkable diversity in the world of nature. This viewpoint focuses on the diverse physical aspect of the universe. "The earth is full of Your creations."

Or we may reflect on the universe's inner side. We may perceive its wonderful sophistication and delicate balance, a reflection of the profundity of its design and purpose. This view perceives the underlying spiritual nature of the universe, focusing on the preliminary design — God's 'thoughts' — which preceded the physical creation. "Your thoughts are very profound."

Back and Front: The Midrash which contrasts man and mosquito opens with the verse, "You formed me back and front" (Psalms 139:5). What does it mean that humanity was formed with two aspects, "back and front"?

'Back' refers to the culmination of the world's physical manifestation. This is the process of creation by contraction (tzimtzum), step by step, until a detailed physical universe, filled with multitudes of diverse creatures, was formed. From this viewpoint, the ubiquitous mosquito is the superior species. If we are not deserving — if we lack our qualitative, spiritual advantage — then we are reminded: "The mosquito preceded you." In a contest of numerical strength and survival skills, the mosquito wins hands down. From the viewpoint of "How many are Your works," even the lowly mosquito comes before us.

'Front,' on the other hand, refers to the conceptual design that preceded the actual physical creation. If we are deserving — if we put our efforts into developing our spiritual side — then we belong to the realm of God's thoughts that transcend the physical world. On the qualitative basis of "How great are Your works," we may take our place before the rest of creation. (Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah, Tazria (1929))

Setting An Example

"The one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the Kohen" (Vayikra 14:35)

It is interesting to note that when the Torah refers to someone who has sara'at on his body, it says, "He shall be brought to the Kohen (14:2). In contrast, in regard to a plague afflicting a house, it says, "He shall come to the Kohen." What reason is there for this disparity between the two plagues? Harav Dovid Feinstein makes a noteworthy observation. The plagues which strike one's body, clothes or home are an indication from Above that something is wrong with this person. The affliction progresses from the individual to his garments until finally his home is struck as well.

Someone whose body has been afflicted has a natural tendency to rationalize the plague. He researches every sickness known to man, rather than concede to the truth that this affliction is an indication of his own spiritual failing. It takes a special person to immediately admit to his own shortcomings. Consequently, it is sometimes necessary for this person to be brought to the Kohen for a ruling regarding this plague.

When the affliction has "graduated" beyond his body and has reached his house, it indicates that the plague is out of control. The spiritual contaminant

has spread to the rest of his household. His family has learned to emulate his evil ways. Only an egotistical individual puts his family in danger of being punished in order to protect himself. When the well-being of his loved ones is at stake, one tends to change his attitude. He no longer needs encouragement to go to the Kohen.

It would serve us well to contemplate these words. We must realize that we are our children's ultimate role models. Our actions speak louder than our words, which may send mixed messages. We may not care about ourselves, but what right do we have to "inspire" our children to think or act in a manner which might be less than acceptable? Perhaps our obligation towards our children can serve as the greatest motivating factor for our spiritual development. (Peninim on the Torah)

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL "And the Cohen shall shut up the (man of the) plague seven days" (13:4)

During this period of seven days, the leper is given the opportunity to repent and thus he may be spared. "When a man sees that suffering comes upon him let him search in his deeds" (Berachot 5A). The purpose of the plague and of misfortunes in general, is to make men more aware of Hashem. And especially to remind them how great was Hashem's kindness hitherto that He had spared this man from such misfortune.

"He that chastises nations, is He not showing something (or: is He not rebuking?), He that teaches Knowledge to Man" (Tehillim 94:10).

This Knowledge is chiefly of two aspects:

- 1) that Hashem conducts all the affairs of the world
- 2) that He bestows happiness on Mankind

Even now, in his misery, the leper is more blessed than chastised. If he is able to see, to talk, to think rationally, to walk, to eat and to sleep, he must learn to be grateful and to understand that the blessings are more than the suffering. He should now repent and learn to thank Hashem for all the good days that he had enjoyed hitherto but had failed in the function of singing in joy to Hashem. And he should even now be grateful for all that Hashem gives him in abundance.

The leper should also find solace in the very great benefit that his plight causes others to fear Hashem. Quoted from "A Kingdom of Cohanim" by Rabbi Miller ZT'L