

CHIZUK & IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

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In Vayikra 14:34 we read: "When you come to the Land of Canaan that I am giving you as an inheritance, and I will place a lesion of Tzara'at (affliction) on the house, in the Land of your inheritance."

Rashi, following the words of the Talmud (Horayot 11a) says that these are good tidings since the homeowner of a house afflicted with Tzara'at, could expect to find - while dismantling the walls of his home - gold which had been hidden in the walls by the original Canaanite owners. The Torah Temima explains that the source of this surprising contention is to be found in the Torah's usage of the phrase V'NATATI NEGA TZARA'AT, (literally I will grant or give), which regularly indicates a gift or a benefit received. This helps us understand how the rabbis derived their Peirush from the words of the verse, but it doesn't answer the additional question of why the plague of Tzara'at meted out as a punishment for slanderous speech should result in such a rewarding outcome. After all, if the

affliction is seen as a form of Divine punishment, then why should it have such should have a silver, (or rather, a gold lining) attached to it?

I should like to concentrate on the explanation of the Kli Yakar who suggested that Tzara'at should be seen not so much a punishment as much as a wake-up call directed towards the unrepentant slanderer. If the call is promptly heeded one can even expect to be rewarded.

[The Kli Yakar, Rabbi Efrayim Ben Aharon (b. 1550), served as the Rabbi of the city of Lvov, and later as the Chief Rabbi of Prague . When he was in his early fifties he fell deathly ill (as a result, the name Shlomo was added to his given name and he became Shlomo Efrayim) and vowed to compose a commentary to the Torah were he to regain his health. Approximately a year later he completed his commentary which became an instant classic.]

The Kli Yakar states that, in essence, the Tzara'at served as an early warning system. Thinking in relation to modern-day concepts, the Tzara'at could be viewed, in a certain sense, as a spiritual version, or parallel, to the NORAD (the North American Air Defense Command) early-warning system created in the fifties to warn of incoming missiles launched from Russia, or more recently the Israeli manufactured Iron-Dome system

deployed near the Azza border. Before the devastating missile could land wreaking havoc, the early warning provided one with the ability to make last minute adjustments to lessen any harm. Here too, when a house was hit by Tzara'at, this served as a warning to its owner, that evil was to be found within its confines. M'TZORA - MOTZI-RA. The Tzara'at revealed the problematic situation which could not be allowed to go on any longer: Rather than inviting and welcoming guests into the home, Bnei Habayit, the household had behaved in a stingy manner (TZARUT AYIN), regarding their home as a private castle into which any "outsiders" were not granted entry. As a result of such conduct, the Almighty has decided to take them to task. The home was struck by a plague, as a first warning signal. If the initial warning did not lead to a change in the way things were being done, then the affliction would be intensified and would progress to the next level. If at first it was the walls of the home that had been affected, the next stage would bring the affliction closer to heart as a person's clothes would now show signs of Tzara'at HaBegeg. If this additional warning turned out to be insufficient, the next stage of the process would be to proceed to an even more intimately experienced signal, as the Tzara'at lesions took

hold upon one's body. This is one of the reasons the Rambam tells us (Peirush HaMishnayot N'ga'im 12:5) that these various forms of Tzara'at were not natural physical illnesses but rather miraculous events.

This notion of a Divine signalling system which utilizes affliction with the intention that the events wake us from our spiritual slumber and galvanize us to take action is highly instructive in attempting to make sense of our national history over the past generation.

The CHIBAT TZION MOVEMENT - an important forerunner of the Zionist Organization - which was aimed at promoting the return of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael, was established in Russia following the pogroms of 1881-1882. The great suffering and affliction experienced during those years served as the impetus for this movement, which began the process of shifting our national consciousness back towards our ancestral homeland. [This idea in no way exonerates our enemies for their malicious behavior, and yet, nonetheless, a basic Jewish belief is that we view every event as a vehicle for our own self-improvement.]

Seeking to encourage Jews to settle in Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Shmuel Mohiliver, and others, influenced Baron Edmond de Rothschild to purchase land for

Jewish colonization, and encouraged courageous families to take the plunge and give it a try .

Rabbi Mohilever's message for the Jews of his time was: "Why do you remain aloof while our Land is being built? Come redeem the soil and build structures to reach up to the Heavens." Although a significant number of people heeded the initial call, the multitudes stayed away. The mass emigrations only occurred when many others were awoken as the signalling hit more strident and horrific notes...

More than 125 years later, Rabbi Mohilever's words continue to resound in our ears - let us not stay away any longer... 🏠👉

Shabbat HaGadol 2016

On Pesach night do we do so many different things in order to attract the children's attention and involve them in the Seder activities. We expectantly turn to the youngest of all participants, eagerly awaiting their shy and hesitant rendition of the four questions, of the MA NISHTANA. As regards to the older children, no Seder would be the same without the Afikoman "treasure hunt" (which for many will become ingrained as the peak memory of the Seder night for years to come...). How are we to

understand this unusual focus on the younger generation? Surely, many reasons have been put forth, and yet I find the answer suggested by Rav Soloveitchik zt"l to carry unparalleled force. R. Soloveitchik highlights a unique capability which all children possess, one which we, the adults, have long forgotten. Children have a natural capability to relive a story, injecting themselves into the tale they hear and directly experiencing the events.

Whereas the adult perceives himself as removed from historical experiences, at best commemorating past events as anniversaries of days gone by, children have the ability to immerse themselves into the ancient stories, and via their imagination breathe life into the dry words.

The Rambam writes that on the Seder night CHAYAV ADAM L'HAR'OT ET ATZMO, one is obligated to show, or present himself as one exiting Egypt. Amongst Yemenite Jewry many follow this directive by having the leader of the Seder put on a knapsack and take a walking stick in hand to show that he is literally prepared to leave Egypt. While the adult may view such behavior as frivolous play acting, for the children this is a way of stepping back into history, viewing the Exodus through the present tense. Perhaps the great emphasis we place on the children,

stems from the fact that through the wondrous look we see in their eyes, we too, the adults can share in their magical journey through time.

Many Chasidic thinkers have discussed how the Jewish calendar assumes that there is a circular, repetitive, aspect to time. As Rabbi Moshe Bamberger writes in his work on "Hallel", we regard time: "Not in a linear fashion but in a circular one. Events around the Jewish calendar are analogous to train stations on a circular time track." On the Seder night our goal is not to "turn the clock back" and return to an earlier era, but rather to tap into Geulat Mitzrayim taking place in the present.

This perspective can radically change the way we look at this night: If the entire process is reenacted on a yearly basis, then we realize that the stakes are exceedingly high. After all, although we tend to overlook it, we know that during the original Exodus millions of Jews were not included amongst the fortunate. As the Seder night arrives we must pause and candidly ask ourselves: Are we deserving to be counted amongst the CHAMUSHIM (one-fifth, or one in five-hundred) who leave, or will we be amongst those left behind?

Indeed, what was it that led so many of our brethren to choose to stay in Egypt? - In order to break away from

past mistakes, we have to understand their causes.

Midrash T'hilim (107,114), as quoted by the Rosh Yeshiva of Kerem B'Yavneh teaches us that: "When Israel went out of Egypt, Hashem "took one nation from the midst of another nation", (D'varim 4:34) - Like a shepherd extracting the fetus from its mother's womb."

The Maharal (Gevurot Hashem, 3) writes that the point of the Midrash is to explain that at the time of the Exodus we were enslaved not only physically but spiritually as well. We had become so intertwined with the Egyptian values and mores, so intermingled with the Egyptian way of life, that we were like a fetus residing within its mother's womb, woefully incapable of independent existence.

As we near the end of the Seder we will all proclaim: L'SHANA HABA'A BIRUSHALAYIM! - and yet we know that only a small proportion of Jews will actually board the "Jerusalem Express" and be here next year. Why is that? What inhibits Jews from leaving galut and being amongst the Chamushim who get up and come here?

Continuing the Maharal's line of thought, it seems that today too, many have become enslaved by the corporate mentality and by suburban values and culture - they too have

been swallowed up by the West, viewing themselves like the embryo which cannot survive outside its mother's womb.

Shabbat HaGadol is a reminder that one can tear oneself away. It can be done. On Shabbat HaGadol we commemorate the heroic actions of our ancestors who daringly captured and slayed the Egyptian deity, reclaiming thereby our own cultural independence.

Once every year as we chant L'SHANA HABA'A BIRUSHALAYIM, the Jerusalem Express prepares to leave the station. As the conductor begins to chant: "All aboard, all aboard last call for Jerusalem!" - take one long look into your childrens' wide open starry eyes, and I'm sure you will muster the courage to hop aboard! 🚂🔥

These weekly words of Torah wisdom can be found in my recently published book "Eretz Yisrael and Aliyah in the weekly Parsha". It can be ordered by calling 052-336-0553 or by ordering it on Amazon