

The Daily Portion - Sivan Rahav Meir

Five ideas for Shabbat

Translated by Janine Muller Sherr

1) This Shabbat, in all shuls throughout the world, we will be reading two parashiot in Sefer Vayikra that have intriguing names –TAZRI'A and M"TZORA. Parashat Tazria opens with the wonder of childbirth. What does a woman do after she gives birth? When and why does she go to the Beit HaMikdash and offer a sacrifice? This is followed by the mitzvah of circumcising a baby boy when he is eight days old.

2) Then the parashiot turn to the topic of tzaraat. It sounds like magic: Someone speaks lashon hara (evil speech) and as a result develops tzaraat on his or her skin. Tzaraat is not a medical condition but a manifestation of an ethical flaw. Therefore, the person with tzaraat doesn't go to a doctor; instead, he goes to a kohen, the community educator, who evaluates his situation and offers guidance. The M'tzora must go through a period of social isolation and character refinement, and can only return to the Beit HaMikdash and to human society after undergoing a purification process.

3) In today's world, we no longer have tzaraat but the laws against speaking lashon hara still apply – now and forever. Every word that comes out of our mouths is significant. Our commentators speak extensively about forbidden and defective speech, as well as the power of positive and uplifting speech. In Mishlei we read the verse: "The power of life and death is in the tongue." In an age of cyberbullying, classroom ostracization, and "keyboard warriors", we are more cognizant than ever of the truth of this statement. We must choose carefully what we say and when and how we say it.

4) S'firat HaOmer (the Counting of the Omer) is now in full swing, as we continue to count the days until Shavuot. This Shabbat will be the 16th day of the Omer. On the Shabbatot in which we count the Omer it is customary to study Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers).

5) And finally: The month of Nissan will have drawn to a close, and Friday and Shabbat are Rosh Chodesh Iyar.

Chodesh Tov and Shabbat Shalom!

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