

Tazri'a 5776

BS"D Parashat Tazri'a 5776

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When Tzara'at is Sadly Tahor

Our parsha deals with the laws of tzara'at (a whitish blemish on the skin wherein the hairs have turned white and renders the individual to be a potential metzora). When a Kohen examines the sufferer and declares him to be so, the metzora must leave a walled city and live as a recluse until the signs disappear.

However, if the blemish expands to cover the sufferer's entire body, he is tahor (pure and opposite of tamei or impure) and may return to his former life free of any halachic constraints.

Even within the world of unexplained mitzvot, this situation is conspicuously strange. The limited sign of tuma (impurity) renders one tamei, but the maximum sign renders him to be tahor?

But it is not so strange.

One who is very ill but with a chance of recovery will be put on a strict medicinal regimen and food diet. If the patient takes a turn for the worse and all hope of recovery is lost, the doctor will stop the medicines and permit him to eat whatever he wishes.

One who is fundamentally a God-fearing Jew, but suffers from

some personal character flaw – like lashon hara or selfishness – will be stricken with tzara'at and its halachic implications in the hope that he will draw the necessary moral conclusions and do tshuva. However, when the sign of tzara'at expands to cover his entire body, HaShem is saying that this individual is so beyond doing tshuva that he may return to his former life and people will simply have to be wary of his presence.

Potential Olim & Newton's Law

In terms of potential olim to Eretz Yisrael, the Jews in the United States can be broadly divided into four groups: The Unaffiliated, the Conservative and Reform offshoots from Judaism, the various Chassidic sects with some stragglers from the "Lithuanian" yeshivot, and the "Modern Orthodox" with its diverse range of affiliates.

The Unaffiliated have terminated their 3500 years of being part of the Jewish nation, with their only connection with our people through their unwitting anti-Semitic neighbors who will never let them forget their Abrahamic antecedents.

The Reform and Conservative are being held to Judaism by a thin strand of habit and nostalgia of grandmother's chicken soup.

The Chassidic sects and some "Lithuanian" yeshivot are not far from declaring themselves as the only authentic Jews, while all others are imposters who cannot be considered for marriage and whose kashrut is unworthy for Jewish consumption.

This leaves the fourth group of Modern Orthodox, which is the only one that has potential for aliyah. So the big question is why are they not coming?

The most logical and practical answer is the partnership between Newton's first law of motion (inertia in which an object at rest stays at rest and an object in motion stays in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force) and the desire to continue the "good life".

This is what I believed until I read two articles, one penned by a young man and the other by a young woman who claim to be Orthodox.

They both share the almost terminal disease of galut, although there is a great difference in their outlooks. I do not condemn them, because I am not the "sheriff of this town" and because they were exposed to rabbis and teachers who themselves are products of modern-day miraglim.

The young lady writes:

"Within the Modern Orthodox community, the question is rarely one of loving Israel. Our allegiance is assumed, our reverence expected. Israeli flags in dorm rooms and teary eyes during the recital of Ha'Tikvah serve as confirmations. We dance on Yom HaAtzmaut and cry on Yom HaZikaron. We visit Israel for holidays and reminisce fondly about our seminary and yeshiva experiences, traipsing around the cobble-stoned streets of Jerusalem.

But who's going back?

Those who answer deal breaker have chosen Israel. But for those of us who finagle around the question of aliyah, talking about jobs and family ties and war-zones, we've chosen America.

I don't make light of these considerations. I don't make light of the decision to stay in the United States. What I find interesting, however, is the way we acknowledge the decision we have made to stay in America. More oft than not, the challenge to verbalize the decision is accompanied by justifications, rationalizations, ambivalence, and even shame.

We justify: we're here, yes. But our hearts are with Israel. We proudly display libi ba'mizrach (my heart is in the east) quotations on necklaces, rings and bracelets. We assiduously keep up with the news, visit when we can, and add the names of soldiers to our daily prayers. But are we going? Make no mistake: aliyah is not a passive choice. It is a dream that has to be prioritized. No choice is the tacit agreement to stay here.

When the aliyah question is addressed to me, my response is wrought with ambivalence. When I am posed with the question, I recall longingly the unique experience of being a Jew in Israel. I recall the chag sa'meach greeting signs on buses, the taxi driver who handed me a small book of tehillim and told me to recite after him, and the elementary school children at Shabbat tables who could recite entire sections of chumash by heart. I respond that aliyah is an ideal. A far off dream, perhaps – but a dream no less vivid.

However, the pronouncement of aliyah as an unequivocal ideal is quickly followed by a laundry list of buts. My career. The language. Money. The precarious way of life. The foreign culture. The school systems.

An ideal? Yes. Am I going? No. This is the response I give. It is also the response I have received, time and time again, in return.

I don't usually let the contradiction and inconsistency of this reply bother me. The response has enabled me to affirm my unwavering allegiance to the dream of Israel while simultaneously excusing my decision to stay here. Though we usually strive to achieve ideals, somehow we are okay with leaving the dream of aliyah respectfully untouched. Israel has become more a statement of ideology than a plan of action.

But sometimes the disingenuousness does bother me."

And the article continues.

Clearly, the writer acknowledges that aliyah is the demand of the Torah, but she cannot rise above her doubts and weaknesses.

The second article – a response to the above – is much more offensive to the mitzva of aliyah:

"After coming across 'My friend (her name)... Aliyah: A sacrifice too big?' I immediately decided to respond to some of her assertions. Though her prose is well-crafted, she establishes an allegation about the Modern Orthodox Jewish establishment that I believe to be incorrect. She asserts that Aliyah is viewed as an ideal by most in America's Modern Orthodox community, and that those who stay in America understand their decision through 'justifications, rationalizations, ambivalence, and even shame.' For myself and many other American Orthodox Jews, I know this to be hardly the case. Our decision to remain in America rests on

the fact that we identify ourselves firmly as Americans. We don't view living in America as a timid compromising of ideals; we see it as an ideal in and of itself.

For me and many other American Orthodox Jews, we proudly see America as our homeland. We believe that American culture is our culture, and certainly Jewish culture has contributed to it. There isn't anything shameful about being an American, quite the reverse is true.

To me and the overwhelming majority of America's Jews, we have no reason to apologize for living in America. I am proud to be an American, and I don't see Aliyah as that 'unequivocal ideal'."

The author of this article is truly focused on being a loyal son of the galut. However, he does not hear the echoes of the Jews in many lands who made similar statements, but retracted them while on their way to the pyres of Spain and Portugal, and to the death camps and crematoria of Eastern Europe.

The young woman who longs for Eretz Yisrael but cannot get herself to make the leap is basically a conscientious daughter of the Jewish nation. However, she is afflicted with a metzora blemish that renders her temai'a and in need of loving care to nurse her back to Jewish sanity.

The young man probably began his retreat from Judaism and Eretz Yisrael quite like the young woman. However, his blemish spread to his entire being. He readily and without shame admits to being body and soul a son of the new "God's chosen people" – the American nation.

Like the metzora whose blemish spread to cover his whole being, this young man is released from the halachic restraints

of the metzora, because he is beyond healing. He and others like him are beyond the lessons of history and the traditions of our people. He will continue to be a loyal son of the United States, even if at some point the US policy might be against the State of Israel.

Centrifuge of the Jewish Nation

A centrifuge is an instrument that rotates around a fixed axis, spinning in a circle and causing the denser substances and particles in a closed container (i.e. a test tube) to move outward, thereby displacing the less dense particles and moving them to the center.

The history surrounding Eretz Yisrael has from time immemorial been the centrifuge of the Jewish nation. Those people more densely involved in materialism are dispatched from it, while the spiritually minded remain close to the axis of sanctity.

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov, the month when we shall all proclaim

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד
וְיֵשׁוּעָה בְּיָמֵינוּ וְיִשְׁלָמֵנוּ
וְיִשְׁלַח לָנוּ מִלְּפָנֵי
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

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