

# Tazri'ah 5774

## National Nega Tzaraat

Our parasha discusses the appearance of a whitish mark on the skin or scalp, which requires a Kohen's determination if it is a tuma producing nega tzara'at (blemish). The determination is dependent on the mark's degree of whiteness, ranging from the most tamai white as snow to the least white like the color of the inner membrane of an egg and the paling of the hair within the blemish. If the Kohen cannot make a determination, then the individual is placed in isolation for a week. If the area of the blemish became enlarged, and the hair in the blemish turned white the individual was declared by the Kohen to be tamei.

A healthy spiritual body, with a sound mental state and spiritual sensitivity require precision balance in each of these respective systems, and total synchronization of all systems together. Up to a certain time in our history, the tell-tale signs of spiritual imbalance were the physical appearances of nega blemishes.

At Mount Sinai, HaShem chose the Jewish people, blessing us with spiritual and physical perfection. The 613 Torah mitzvot created an everlasting bond between the Creator and His preeminent creation – the Jewish people – while forging a national bond between the twelve loosely connected tribes.

The national bond consists of a common land – Eretz Yisrael. A mutual language – Ivrit. A shared history – the temporary slavery experience under Paro exchanged for eternal servitude to HaShem. And the promise of an eventual perfect material and spiritual destiny.

As time progressed, the Jewish nation grew further away from the Sinai experience and coupled with 2000 years of exile we see within us tell-tale signs of national nega tzaraat of

various ideological “colors” and distortions.

The Jews in Eretz Yisrael are faithful to the national aspect of our existence. We live in the God given land of our fathers. Ivrit is our “resurrected,” living language, which makes us the only people in the world who can converse comfortably with an ancestor who lived 3000 years ago. We have created one of the most lethal and effective military machines, and produced many technological advancements far above the ability of most modern nations. And although most Israelis do not define themselves as dati (religiously observant) the majority believe in the Jewish God and are traditional in practice. This is a marked improvement over the weakened spiritual norm that existed when I came on aliya 52 years ago. Nevertheless, anything less than total acceptance of our holy Torah and mitzvot by all people here is a nega (blemish) on our nation’s status as HaShem’s chosen people.

In contrast to the situation in Israel, the prevailing feeling among the orthodox Jews in the galut, specifically in the United States, is the reverse of what we find here. The orthodox (I don’t relate to reform or conservative who are on their way out of Judaism) are halachically observant, but have little or no conscious feeling of belonging to, or association with, or a common attachment to a separate, distinct nation.

As a boy growing up in Brooklyn, and attending a local “yeshiva” with its educational policy, Washington was my capitol and the ‘Star Spangled Banner” my national anthem. English was my language. (Nothing has changed in the many years which have passed, except that sports and food are now the most discussed subjects.) And the “stars and stripes” unfurling in the wind made my heart skip a beat. Our national identity was not with the tiny Asian land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, but to the then 48 states between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

As with a blemish where there is uncertainty if it is a nega,

and the sufferer must be isolated to see how the blemish develops, so too will be the fate of these two blemishes on our nation's ethos – the less than religiously observant average Israeli and the disconnected average orthodox Jew in the galut. HaShem is waiting to see how they will develop over time.

As it appears now, the nationalistic but less than Torah observant community in Israel is moving in the direction of Torah observance. Were it not for certain extreme elements in our religious society, the religious level of the general public would be much more impressive. As it is today, there is hardly a kibbutz or moshav that does not have a bet kneset. Places where the parents 20-30 years ago would never enter a bet kneset, have hotels and restaurants with the most strict kashrut standards. The majority of junior officers in Tzahal today are religious.

The hareidi and modern orthodox communities in the galut are also being given their time. As of now, they are distancing themselves ever more from the living words of the prophets regarding our return to Eretz Yisrael and the fulfillment of the dream of the rebuilt Bet Hamikdash. Their mind-set that the Mashiach will send them limousines to bring them back will be destroyed on the background of the realities of life.

When the Mashiach comes he will in all likelihood dispense to each person according to the efforts he expended in enabling the Mashiach's return.

Those people who are less learned and less observant but live and sacrifice in Eretz Yisrael will be sent to the Mirrer yeshiva, Merkaz Harav, etc., to gain the knowledge deprived them by being born to families who themselves were deprived of Torah.

The very observant and learned Jews of the galut will be awarded a special task in the service of Hashem. There are

over 7 billion gentiles in the world who have to be directed in fulfilling the 7 Noachide laws. The Mashiach will appoint the rabbis, grand rabbis, roshei yeshiva etc., now in the galut with the unique privilege to live out their lives in the galut, never to set foot in the Holy Land, as they perform their holy mission to teach the 7 billion gentiles the world over. Good luck!

### **The Para Aduma Lesson for Today**

The tahara process necessitated by an encounter with a corpse was understood by only Moshe Rabbeinu. The Gemara (Yoma 14a) states that even the wisest of men, Shlomo Hamelech, after investigating the natural and supernatural aspects of Para Aduma threw up his hands, exclaiming that the matter was beyond his understanding.

God instilled in man the desire to obtain that which is just beyond his reach, either too distant physically or halachically prohibited. This characteristic is called "yetzer". When it is for the car or the house on the corner which are just beyond one's budget it is called "yetzer hara", when the drive is for torah and wisdom it is called "yetzer tov".

To understand that which the wisest of all men was incapable is certainly beyond the reach of mortal man, but that is what makes the matter all the more enticing – to try and succeed where others have failed.

When studying the matter of Para Aduma the following thought occurred to me, which might allow us a direction in making the matter just a little less obscure.

The atomic table contains (to my last knowledge) 115 elements, some natural some artificial. However, according to the Zohar's table of elements there are only 4, which due to the qualitative and quantitative mixtures produce every physical object in the universe:

*Afar – dust or soil*

*Mayim – water*

*Aish – fire*

*Ru'ach – wind*

The Torah relates that at the early dawn of mankind there were 4 major holocausts:

- 1) When one-third of mankind was killed when Kayin murdered his brother Hevel
- 2) The deluge in the time of Noach
- 3) When the five centers of culture – Sedom and Amora and their three sister cities were destroyed
- 4) When the army of the then super power of Egypt was destroyed in the Red Sea

These holocausts relate to the 4 elements as follows:

- 1) Tradition states that Kayin murdered his brother with a rock and then buried him in the ground, over their dispute on ownership of Mount Moriah. All on the background of the first element “Afar” – soil and dust.
- 2) Humanity was destroyed in the time of Noach through the second element “Mayim” – water.
- 3) The advanced cities of Sedom and Amora were decimated by the third element “Aish” – fire.
- 4) The waters of the Red Sea (Parshat Beshalach) were split by the fourth element “Ruach” when a great wind raged all night and then the wind blew again to restore the waters to their natural state.

Para Aduma utilizes all of these elements: 1) Fire burns the para, 2) which turns into "afar" or ashes; 3) the Kohen then mixes the ayfer with water and 4) He does not pour the liquid on the person coming to be tahor but flings it on him using the wind which the Kohen creates by the force of his arm.

The lesson to be learned from this is that when each element is taken alone it brings death and tuma; however, when taken together through the Para Aduma the joint forces of all the elements brings tahara and life.

I don't know if this is the true track to understanding Para Aduma, but the lesson is applicable to our time: that unity in the Jewish Nation creates an atmosphere of tahara, while disunity produces strife and tuma.

As an example, I would like to relate a most unfortunate incident which occurred several years ago in New York City. The major orthodox organizations were planning a prayer occasion near Wall Street, in view of the difficult military situation which was confronting the Medina at the time. Agudat Yisrael made their participation conditional on no one reciting the "mi sha'bay'rach" prayer for the Medinah for Tzahal.

When I learned of the condition imposed by Agudat Yisrael, I wrote a letter to one of their leading administrators, as if asking his advice in a delicate matter.

*I have a son who is an officer in Tzahal. Many Jews owe their lives to the daily and nightly efforts of him and his soldiers.*

*What should I tell my son when he finds out the holy Agudat Yisrael refused to offer up a prayer and asks, "Abba, why didn't they pray that I should come home safely to my wife and children?"*

*And when his wife, who is a talmida chachama (she knows more about korbanot being a teacher in an ulpana than most rabbis living abroad), asks me: "Abba why didn't they pray that my husband should return safely to me and our children?"*

*And when their children ask: "Saba why didn't they pray that Abba comes home safely to us""*

*I ask you learned rabbi: "What should I tell them?"*

I did not receive a reply to my letter.

Let us inculcate the lesson of the Para Aduma: Disunity brings death and tuma, but unity brings life and tahara.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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