

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS:	<i>Torah Tazria:</i>	Leviticus 13:1-28
	<i>Haftarah:</i>	II Kings 5:1-14
	<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	Matthew 8:1-4

When a mark of tzara'at is on a man, he is to go to the kohen.

[Leviticus 13:9]

Today's Meditation is II Kings 15:1-7;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #2, *T'shuvah* [Starting Over]

Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe v'el-Aharon l'emor – Then the Holy One spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying ... ***Adam ki-yihyeh v'or-besaro set*** – when a man has a swelling eruption in his flesh ... ***o-sapachat*** – or a sunken lesion/scab ... ***o vaheret*** – or a discolored spot **Leviticus 13:1-2.**

Everybody wants to know about 'the mark'. Everybody seems to have his or her own ideas about what 'the mark' consists of. But ... can we talk?

Introducing ... 'the Mark'

The Abiding Presence of the Creator has taken up residence in our midst. First the Glory filled the *Mish'kan*; then fire from Heaven lit the altar. The Great Overshadowing, Intimate Indwelling, and Radical Empowering of humanity that the Holy One has been planning from the foundation of the world² as His *B'tzelem Elohim* stratagem³ is now unveiling as a reality. Mere mortals are learning how to host the Ultimate Royal *Persona*. Fallible humans are being called to steward Immaculate Divinity. This changes EVERYTHING!

As a result of the suddenly inescapable Presence of the Holy One in our midst we are all having to come to grips with a *heightened state of spiritual awareness and responsibility*. In the powerful glow of the *Radiant Cloud of the Bridegroom-King's Glory*, it turns out, we suddenly find *we can see many things we could not see before*. It is as if we had previously seen the world only through a glass darkly, while now it is absolutely bathed with light. And in this never-before experienced level of Divine illumination even those things we could see with our natural human vision before the *Manifest Presence of the Holy One* came to dwell in our camp

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² See Exodus 25:8.

³ See Genesis 1:13-14. *B'tzelem Elohim* is usually translated into English as 'in the image of God', but more accurately means *in the shadow of God*.

look different – because our perspective on such things has been dramatically transformed.

We are suddenly appreciating the fact that the Holy One has established in our world a series of offsetting realms – realms that counterbalance and nurture each other. We are seeing how that which is holy offsets and brings contrast to that which is common/profane; how that which ‘clean’ offsets and brings contrast to that which is ‘unclean’; and how that which the Holy One calls ‘food’ sets off and counterbalances against that which He says is ‘unfood’. We are seeing how this parallels the counterbalancing realms of light and darkness, the waters above and the waters below, the dry land and the seas; the waning and the waxing stars, planets, and galaxies; the ecosystem of the sea and the ecosystems of the atmosphere and the dry earth. We are seeing how everything that is decaying is always offset and counterbalanced by something that is flourishing. We are seeing that every nugget of what human beings think of as information is counterbalanced and autocorrected by Divine revelation. We are discovering that for every word of falsely called 'wisdom' that flows from the mind and mouth and writings of fallen men there is an offsetting pearl of pure Wisdom from the Throne of God. We are learning that perspective offsets and counterbalances confusion. We are discovering that mercy offsets and counterbalances judgment. We are finding out that kindness offsets and counterbalances cruelty. And we are discovering that our covenant with the Creator offsets and counterbalances the human urge to fret over evil doers, stress over enemies, control family members and friends, run from life’s toughest challenges, or fear tomorrow.

No one can deny it - the presence of the Holy One in the midst of our camp has changed the way we look at virtually everything. Case in point – our *own skin*. As the Light of our Creator’s countenance has fallen upon us we have discovered to our horror that little things we never paid much attention to about ourselves – irritating imperfections, areas of sensitive scar tissue, crusty places *on our skin* and in our souls – suddenly seem to stick out like sore thumbs.

Welcome to *Divine Dermatology 101*. Spots? Blemishes? Bumps? Rashes? Wrinkles? The Holy One has an ‘app’ for that!

Seeing Spots!

With increased Light has come increased visibility. In the intense glow of the Holy One’s Manifest Presence we are suddenly *seeing unsightly and embarrassing things in ourselves*. And we suddenly feel so *exposed*, so *unworthy*, and *unlovely*, and *desperately in need of a healing touch from the Great Physician*. It is like the

first chapter of the Song of Solomon, when the Shulamite suddenly self-aware, begins to recognize flaws in herself that she had never noticed before. In horror she declares: *Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has shone upon me.* Song 1:6.

As it was with the maiden in the Song, who began to see the flaws in herself after an encounter with the splendor of her king, so it is with the men and women of B'nei Yisrael. Coinciding with the dramatic and wonderful descent of the Holy One's Manifest Presence into the camp, they began to see all kinds of spots and wrinkles in themselves. They now understood how Adam and Chava felt in the Garden after ingesting the fruit of the tree of knowledge. They thought they had their fallen state covered with fig leaves – until the Holy One revealed His Manifest Presence all around them. Now we know how Kayin felt. He thought he had buried his guilt over murdering Hevel underground along with his brother's body – until the Holy One invaded his space and spoke to him. The Holy One's Manifest Presence has that kind of effect on people. Once the shouting and falling on our faces phase passes, this '*sudden realization of the darkness that is in us*' phase sets in. Hence, in the Book of Yeshayahu [Isaiah] we read that at the manifestation of the Holy One's glory even devout *Yeshayahu* suddenly became painfully aware that he had *tamei* lips and dwelt in the midst of a people of *tamei* lips⁴.

In the brilliant light of His Presence, you see, the thin veneers of spirituality mortal humans hide within melt away. We *become completely transparent*. All our blemishes are *revealed*. In His Presence we cannot hide *anything* from *anyone*. But that is not, by any means, the end of the story. The real story the Torah is telling us is not a sad tale of a terrible disease – it is telling us about an AWE-INSPIRING PROTOCOL THAT LEADS TO HEALING AND WHOLENESS.

So, We See Spots and Wrinkles ... What Are We To Do?

How are we to navigate the danger zone of the realization of our own faults and imperfections? Ah, Beloved. Our initial fleshly reactions may be as Adam's were, namely to:

1. *try to cover up* our inadequacies;
2. to *run and hide* in hopes no one will see us, and then,
3. when found, simply try to *blame someone else*.

A later stage of fleshly reaction may be to do as Kayin did and *get surly with our Maker*. But none of these fleshly reactions will get us through the danger zone. They will just prolong our shame – and extend exponentially the time we spend in

⁴ See Isaiah 6:5.

the danger zone. Fortunately however the *aliyot* of parsha ***Tazria*** provide us some very *good news* in this regard. What good news, you ask? The good news is that, in our heightened state of awareness resulting from the presence of the ***Mish'kan*** in our camp, not only can we see those blemishes, the Holy One has actually given us specific instructions to empower us to *deal with them in a meaningful way before they engulf and overwhelm us*.

The Holy One has a solution. All we have to do is what Yeshayahu did – admit that we are *tamei*, *acknowledge* that *we are not by any means the only ones*, *seek help and counsel from our High Priest*, and then *deal with our spots, blemishes, scar tissue, and open, oozing wounds meaningfully, according to Divine Protocol*, instead of *living in denial, covering, hiding, and blaming others*. Is it better to think we are perfect, whole, and spot-free when in reality we are far from it? Or is it better to see ourselves as we really are, with all our faults, and then begin working on eradicating both the symptoms and the root cause of our problem. Most skin lesions, you see, are a product of something that goes much deeper. Some are related to what we have ingested. Some are related to the things we have touched. Some are related to emotional outbursts; some to hormonal imbalances related to the season of life we are in, and some to viruses and bacteria, which have overcome our body's immune system and are wreaking havoc in our bloodstream and/or lymph system. And then there are some that have roots that go deeper still.

The Connection Between Outward Physical and Inward Spiritual Conditions

Hopefully we all understand that there are always outward physical signs that go with any inward spiritual problem. Most of us today recognize outbursts of seething anger as one of the most obvious outward physical signs of inward spiritual problems. Most of have come to see fear of man and emotional guarding as clear signals of spiritual problems as well. And who can deny the spiritual roots underlying depression, and hopelessness, and negative confession. Not to mention spiritual red flags like arrogance, and faultfinding, and gossip. And seeking attention ... and jealousy ... and covetousness. And engaging in either giving or receiving of flattery. And then there is the 'masking' behavior pattern of spending more money than you make. And callousness toward the needs of the widow, the orphan, the foreigner and the poor man you pass on the street. Oooooohhh ... that is going to leave a 'mark'!

Shall I go on? Or have I hit already hit a sore spot?

Service Engine Soon!

The automobile I drive has a very irritating light on the instrument panel that comes on every so often. The light is bright red, and in the center are the words '***Service Engine Soon!***' Of course, the purpose of that light is to tell me that my vehicle's engine is in need of attention. It might or might not be serious. It could just be scheduled maintenance. Or it could be a major mechanical problem about to wreak serious havoc on my pocketbook. Whatever the problem is, if that light comes on and I do not pay attention to the warning sign it provides, my transportation situation is only going to get worse. I really do not like seeing that light come on, of course. But I am still very, very glad that the engineers on the design team made sure that unpleasant little warning light would become a part of my vehicle's instrument panel.

Do you get the relevance of the 'warning light' to our spiritual discussion? The point is that things such as I listed in the preceding paragraphs – physical things like outbursts of anger, negative confession, critical speech, attention-seeking, etc. - all function with regard to our spiritual health very similar to the way the '***Service Engine Soon!***' light on my instrument panel functions in regard to my aging Honda's engine. Each of the physical and emotional conditions and/or manifestations I mentioned virtually screams out '***Service Spiritual Engine Soon!***'

Our Divine Bridegroom knows us intimately, loves us deeply, and is both too wise and too kind to let us live in self-deceit. He wants us to be fully aware of our spots and wrinkles and blemishes. And He wants us to have complete confidence that if we will just cooperate with Him, He can cleanse us of them. He has therefore programmed/engineered our new creation identities to respond to specific warning signs.

The Holy One's love for us means that a whole unit of His 'Bride-training' book involves teaching us how to respond when "spots and wrinkles and blemishes" appear which could be trying to warn us of potential spiritual tinderboxes lurking just below the surface of our personalities. He does not want us to panic. He knows it is not in our best interest to ignore our issues, hide them, sulk over them, or waste time, energy and money trying to cover them up. He does not want us to blame anybody else – or for that matter, to blame Him. He does not want us to hate ourselves. He doesn't want us to increase the damage – and extend the time we spend in the danger zone – by a wrong response to what He desires to be healed as part of our Ultimate Divine Bridal Make-Over. He wants us to *Service our Spiritual Engine Soon!*

Bridging the Great Cultural Divide

Between Today's Scientific Theories and the Wisdom of the Kingdom

Before we get too far off into this truth however we need to do some unpacking of some of the cultural baggage that most of us in twenty-first Century Western Culture bring to the *bemah* with us. If as we read the next few aliyot we insist on thinking like twenty-first Century Westerners, you see, we will walk away from our study shaking our heads in bewilderment and wondering if maybe all those 'the covenant of Torah is outdated has been superseded' folks out there in Christendom might just have a point. Let's take a moment to unpack our cultural baggage, bridge the cultural divide, and give the Holy One's Word a chance to touch us the way it was intended to. Remember, the Holy One said: ""

Most people living in the twenty-first Century, particularly in Western culture, simply have no frame of reference into which to fit the instructions in the aliyot we will read for the next two days. Several generations of us, you see, have grown up in absolute awe of modern medicine and pharmacology and utterly convinced that those two disciplines hold the answer to all things affecting the human body – and increasingly the human mind. We have been indoctrinated with horror stories – partially true, of course - about primitive societies who let their populace be unnecessarily decimated by illness because their superstition led them to consider all adverse health conditions as either '*the will of the gods*' which cannot be changed, or as responsive only to magic spells and/or shamanism.

Modern medicine helps us fight off disease – and emotional problems -better, live longer, and feel more in control of our lives. And in a day and age in which our world has no *Mish'kan* and is therefore by and large un-illuminated by the Divine Radiance, for the multitudes who see through a glass darkly a little medication, a little spending spree, and a little '*I'm okay, you're okay*' counseling are all most people really want - or think they need. Hence when most people in today's 'enlightened' Western world read instructions in the ancient texts of Torah about how if a person has a certain kind of sore or blemish on his skin he is supposed to show it to an earthly ambassador of the Kingdom of Heaven, and is then under that Kingdom Diplomat's direction to follow a ritual 'cleansing'⁵ procedure having nothing whatever to do with modern medicine, humanistic philosophy, or psychology, they immediately recoil. Western minds have been programmed by our culture, our governments, and the media to distrust any source – especially

⁵ I would suggest that the ritual procedure outlined in Torah has very little if anything to do with 'cleansing', and everything to do with *de-fragmenting, refocusing, restoration to wholeness, and rededication*.

Torah - that suggests that the first response to be done to address a non-traumatic physical condition of the human body should actually be something other than to make an appointment with a doctor and ask for the newest pharmaceutical drug on the market.

Western minds, you see, are programmed by our society to believe, deep down, that doctors, mental health counselors, pharmacists, and folks in white smocks working in the pharmaceutical research and development laboratories are smarter, more intelligent, more rational, more enlightened, more caring, more wise, and more trustworthy than the Holy One.

If your mind has been programmed that way, Dear Reader, now is a good time for a reality check. Modern medicine can do some pretty amazing things, of course [for some pretty spectacular fees, of course]. And because of modern medicine we are definitely better able to manage symptoms and treat trauma today than at any previous time in the history of man. But as wonderful as the blessing of modern medicine is it remains, and will forever remain, subject to very significant limitations. All medicine can ever do, you see, is manage disease and treat trauma. Medicine cannot heal anyone. No doctor or drug can do that. Doctors and drugs can help relieve symptoms, for which we are grateful – but only the Holy One has the power to heal. If therefore any human being wants to be healed rather than just treated for his symptom complex he must look beyond doctors and drugs to the source of healing Himself. If a human being wants to receive healing, or desires to see others receive healing, he ultimately must put his trust in the covenant-keeping God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. The Holy One knows a thousand times more about the human body and the sicknesses that can and do from time to time afflict it than all the doctors and pharmacists and laboratory chemists in the world will ever learn. So when the Holy One speaks to us about what we should do when we have a certain type of affliction or eruption on our skin, perhaps we would be wise – even in the era of modern medicine – to at least listen to what He has to say.

What we are about to read in Torah is not ‘white magic’ or shamanism. It is an essential component of the eternal covenant the Holy One our God has made with His *am segulah* [special treasure people], His *mamlaket kohanim* [kingdom of priests], and his *goy kadosh* [holy nation].

The Process, Protocols, and Preconditions of Declaring Tamei Status

Tumah is nothing to play around with, of course, but *tamei* status is not indicative of Divine displeasure, nor is it a sign of the Holy One's rejection of or judgment against any person's life. Alas, people today tend to be very misinformed about

that. Case in point: I recently heard the gross misinformation of the religious community on this issue demonstrated recently by a speaker who was attempting to teach on the story found in Luke 8 of Yeshua's dealings with the 'woman with the issue of blood'. According to Lukas' account the whole episode occurred on a public thoroughfare as Yeshua was commuting by foot in the direction of the house of Yairus, whose daughter was dying. Somewhere along the road a woman 'who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years' came up behind him as he was walking and touched the hem of his garment. Of course, the lady was healed instantly. The teacher I heard discussing this story focused on how seriously this woman 'broke Old Testament law' when she touched Yeshua. She was 'unclean', the teacher reasoned, so it was an offense worthy of death for her to touch anyone. The teacher even went on to say that by the 'law' this woman was subject to being stoned to death for doing such a thing.

This is simply not true. Where on earth is anything remotely suggesting that found in Torah? Torah does not regard tamei status as not grounds for punishment – much less punishment by death. Therefore, neither is the act of communicating tamei status by touching another considered by Torah to be a sin. The woman with the issue of blood – even assuming she was bleeding when she touched Yeshua – simply did nothing punishable under Torah. Tamei status simply means that a human being has entered a *danger zone* – a state requiring an enhanced state of spiritual awareness, watchfulness, and submission to the Holy One's will. So open your mind and your heart. Everyone becomes tamei at some point in his or her life. You see, Dear Reader, learning to deal effectively with the *sources of emerging tumah* in ourselves is a critical component of our training to become a responsive and loving Bride.

Outward Evidence of Tumah in Human Beings

The Holy One wants His Beloved Bride-to-be to know where the spiritual danger zones in the world He created are – hence He has established 'signs'. The Holy One made every *tahor* animal with signs that clearly indicate it is *tahor* – He made them part the hoof and chew the cud. Similarly, the Holy One made *tahor* fish with signs that clearly indicate that they are *tahor* – they have both fins and scales. In humans, however, we are about to learn, there are no signs indicative of *tahor* status – only signs indicative of *tumah*. The first and most common harbinger of human *tamei* status, as we learned last week, is the consumption of the flesh of *tamei* animals. The second common harbinger of human *tamei* status, also learned last week, is the touching of the carcass of a *tamei* animal. A third common harbinger of human *tamei* status which we learned in yesterday's aliyah is giving birth. We will subsequently learn that there are many more bodily functions – emissions from

either the male or female reproductive systems, etc. – which can bring about a more prolonged *tamei* status.

This brings us to the special kind of *tamei* status the Hebrew text of Torah calls *tzara'at*. This kind of *tumah* is at the opposite end of the continuum from wholeness. This kind of *tumah* is fragmentation of the soul to the extent the body is *oozing perceptible toxicity*. It is the equivalent of *tumah* on steroids. If this highly aggressive *tumah* is not dealt with it will be visited by and ultimately become a stronghold for spirits of uncleanness. This kind does not go away with a *mikveh*, a laundering of clothes, and the setting of the sun.

The presence of the extreme level of active *tumah* known as *tzara'at* calls for a much more serious response – [a] from the affected individual, [b] from the person's fellow members of the redeemed community, and [c] from the *kohen* assigned by the Holy One to love, care for, and help the person. But in the Grand Scheme of the Holy One, our role is to recognize that even *tzara'at*, like all other forms and levels of *tumah*, can serve as a catalyst for a glorious redemption. We are never to be critical, repulsed, judgmental, or self-righteous by a person afflicted with *tzara'at*. Such a person needs our love, our patience, our kindness, our gentleness, and our unswerving hope of and faith for redemption and glorious restoration more than anyone.

We will therefore learn today that the special kind of flowing *tumah* that attaches to someone who is suffering from *tzara'at* calls for that person to take the initiative. The person is not to seclude himself, or hide his oozing blemish(es). He is to seek out and humbly submit to the active intervention of a *kohen*.

The *kohen's* first responsibility is *to love the person unselfishly*. He is not to be revulsed. He is to gently inspect the person, discern the person's condition, and advise him - not the community or social media - of what he discerns. He is not to see the *tumah* in the other person as a permanent problem; but as merely a temporary acute condition. If the presence of *tzara'at* is confirmed by the *kohen*, the *kohen* is responsible for setting the person up in a private place of convalescence located outside the prying eyes of the people in the camp for a period of seven days. At the seven-day period, the *kohen* is then go back out to the affected person and repeat the process as necessary. The *kohen* is always to maintain and communicate to the hope and expectation of a return of the person to wholeness. He is always to be loving, kind, positive, and hopeful [the exact opposite of what the person with *tzara'at* has been]. He is always to be looking for signs of the beginning of the healing process. It always starts from the inside, with humility, with surrender to the

will and timing and protocols of the Holy One, with thanksgiving, and with teshuvah.

***The Honor of Assisting One of the Holy One's Betrothed Bride-People
In the Cleansing of His or Her Spots, Wrinkles,
and Blemishes of the Soul***

The aliyah we read today tells us that anyone afflicted by a certain kind of blemish on his skin – a swelling or rising [Hebrew, *se'et*], a lesion, eruption, or scab [Hebrew, *sapakhat*], or a 'shiny spot', 'white spot', or sore [Hebrew *baheret*] - is to be taken to Aharon or one of the other *kohanim* (priests) for evaluation. A physician may or may not be involved – that is not being addressed either way. The issue the Holy One is addressing is neither disease prevention nor symptom management. The issue the Holy One is 100% spiritual. So let's see what the Holy One has to say on the subject.

Adam ki-yihyeh v'or-besaro s'et o-sapakhat o vaheret
[if] a man has a blotch, discoloration or spot

V'hayah v'or-besaro l'nega tzara'at
coming up on the skin of his flesh, like unto the plague of tzara'at

v'huva el-Aharon ha-kohen
he is to be brought to Aharon,

o el-achad mibanav ha-kohanim
or to one of his descendants, who are the kohanim.

V'ra'ah ha-kohen et ha-nega b'or ha-basar
The kohen is to examine the mark on the skin of the flesh,

V'se'ar b'nega hafach lavan
and if the hair on the mark has turned white,

umar'eh ha-nega amok me'or besaro
and the mark appears to have penetrated the flesh

nega tzara'at hu v'ra'ahu ha-kohen v'time oto
then it is a touch of tzara'at. And when the priest perceives it, he is tamei.
[Leviticus 13:1-3]

Before we dismiss the Holy One's instructions out of hand let us consider for a moment what it might mean for a blotch, discoloration, or spot on our skin to be *l'nega tzara'at*⁶ - i.e. like unto the plague of *tzara'at*. What exactly is the 'plague' of

⁶ By no means every mark or blemish we find on our skin has spiritual implications. In fact, only a blotch, discoloration or spot which is *l'nega tzara'at* - i.e. like unto the plague of *tzara'at* – requires us to even present ourselves to the kohen for evaluation.

tzara'at anyway? The sages of Israel insist that *tzara'at* is neither a medical nor a dermatological condition – but a spiritual condition. They base this position, in part at least, on the fact that Torah introduces us to the skin disorder it calls *tzara'at* as something constituting a *nega*⁷ [a plague] – like unto the plagues with which the Holy One struck Egypt.

In our study last week we were required to take a giant leap of faith out of our theological boxes and stare through a glass darkly into the unseen spiritual realms of *tahor* and *tamei*. Following on the heels of this paradigm-shattering revelation that there are unseen spiritual realms/dimensions all around us, we are now asked to wrap our minds around something even more mysterious – skin sores brought upon us by the Holy One as a kind of discipline, or ‘plague’. It boggles the mind.

Perhaps we have such a hard time wrapping our brains around the Holy One's instructions concerning *tzara'at* because we are so far removed from both the experience of Sinai and the manifest presence of the Holy One. We who live in exile – or in an Israel with neither a *Mish'kan* nor a Temple – simply have no frame of reference for what it would be like to have the Manifest Presence of the Holy One in the midst of our camp and to live in that level of radiance. We are now the light of the world, and alas the light we emit is a lot more like that of a night light than a spotlight. We therefore have no concept of the kind of instant accountability known by those who lived in His Radiance. We cannot even imagine the Holy One chastening us, disciplining us, by causing our skin to erupt with sores everyone could see and could by seeing know that we were not at all what we pretended to be. Let's delve a little deeper and see if we can see what *tzara'at* really is – and what if anything it might have to do with us.

Do You Have ‘Skin In the Game’?

Our aliyah today deals with the skin of our flesh⁸. The Hebrew word translated as “skin” is *`or*⁹. It is a masculine noun meaning hide. It is derived from the primitive verb root *`ur*¹⁰, meaning “stripped naked”, or “laid bare”, or “turned inside out”. The point is clear. From a spiritual standpoint *the condition of our skin is but a reflection of the condition of our heart*.

⁷ The Hebrew word *nega* is *nun, gimel, ayin*, Strong's Hebrew word #5061, pronounced *neh-gah*'. *Nega* is a noun derivative of a Hebrew verb root picturing the infliction of a wound by striking or smiting.

⁸ The word our English Bibles translate as flesh, is the Hebrew noun *basar*, Strong's Hebrew word #1320, made up of the letters *beit, sin, and resh*. Interestingly, this word is a noun derived from a Hebrew verb root meaning to bear or publish good news. Do you catch the Hebraic drift? The Hebrew is telling us that our flesh is created to bear and publish good news – news to gladden the hearts of all people.

⁹ Or is spelled *ayin, vav, resh*. Strong's Hebrew word #5785, it is pronounced *ore*.

¹⁰ *Ur* is Strong's Hebrew word #5783.

Our skin is the largest organ in our body. It contains one third of all the blood vessels in our body as well as our body's primary cooling mechanism – the sweat glands – and a system of oil glands, ducts, and pores which lubricate it to prevent drying out. Our skin comes in contact with the outside world much more than any other organ, and is therefore subjected to many more injury and disease causing agents than the rest of us. Acne, athlete's foot, eczema, psoriasis, impetigo, ringworm, shingles, hives, boils, burns, warts – these and many other skin conditions threaten the precious organ that provides the protective covering for all other organs. What is worse, often if something is wrong on the inside it eventually seems to wind up manifesting on the outside – in our skin - as well! Fever yields heat rash and fever blisters. Anemia results in paleness of skin. And *lashon ha ra* – i.e. speaking judgmentally concerning our brothers - yields ... well, we will get to that in due time!

Is Nega Tzara'at Really 'Leprosy'?

In today's aliyah from parsha Tazria the Holy One addresses a condition of the skin which most of our English Bibles incorrectly translate as "leprosy". It is almost universally believed, however, that the Biblical term differs substantially from the disease currently known as "leprosy" – a bacterial infection also known as Hansen's Disease. The Biblical term, as found in the original Hebrew, is *tzara'at*¹¹.

We need to understand that *tzara'at* is not a malady brought about by natural causes such as bacterium or a virus, nor a contagious condition like Hansen's disease, but a supernatural plague brought by the Holy One on a specific individual. How do we know that, you ask? Think back with me. Do you remember how Torah introduced us to *tzara'at*? The first instance of the use of this term in Torah is found in Exodus 4:6, at the burning bush, when the Holy One says to Moshe:

Now put your hand into your bosom¹¹. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand [was] tzara, and white as snow.

Thus from its beginnings the condition of *tzara'at* was supernatural – something of divine origin, intended for a SIGN. The question remains however why would the Holy One strike Moshe, or anyone for that matter, with a supernatural condition affecting our precious and delicate skin? Before we answer that question let us consider something very strange about the first usage of the word *tzara*. When the Holy One performed the miracle of striking the skin of Moshe's hand with *tzara* it was the second of a series of three miracles which Moshe was empowered to reproduce to show to the elders of the tribes of Israel to convince them he was

¹¹ Tzara'at is *tzade, resh, ayin, tav*. Strong's Hebrew word #6883, it is pronounced *tzaw-rah'-at*.

chosen by the Holy One for the mission of deliverance from Egyptian bondage (the first was turning Moshe's staff into a crocodile), and the third was the turning of water into blood).

Thus *tzara'at* was constituted and appointed by the Holy One as a sign and witness to Israel (not to Pharaoh, who never saw this particular sign). It was one of three witnesses designed specifically for the elders of Israel - for in the Holy One's judicial system there must be two or three witnesses for a thing to be established. This sign and witness fulfilled its intended purpose –

*Moshe and Aharon assembled all the elders of Israel ...
and Moshe also performed the signs before the people,
[including, of course, the sign of tzara] ... and they believed.
[Exodus 4:29]*

So we see that *tzara'at* is no ordinary disease. It is not something that occurs naturally like poison ivy or hives. Nor is it something one “catches” like impetigo or pink eye. It is something the Holy One sends for a sign and a testimony of a spiritual truth. It is a sign for the covenant community, not for the pagan world around us. It is *a visible, physical manifestation of a spiritual reality within*. What spiritual reality, you ask? We will get to that in a moment. First let us define *lashon ha ra* Hebraically so that we will better understand what it is we are really dealing with.

Defining Lashon Ha Ra Hebraically

It may help everyone to remember that the caution against *Lashon ha ra* is by no means a 'stand-alone' concept. *Lashon ha ra* is only one element of *derech Adonai* [i.e. the 'way of the Holy One']. The *target/goal at which we aim* and the gold standard to which we as children of Avraham aspire is the Genesis 18:19 standard, namely: ...to *tzavah* [i.e. enjoin, intertwine] *our children and our households after us* to *sh'mar* [i.e. highly treasure and jealously guard, protect and preserve] *the 'way of the Holy One'...* to *asah* [i.e. build, fashion, mold, shape, construct and model on earth according to a Heavenly pattern] *tzedakah* [i.e. what Messiah would do in the circumstance in which we/they find ourselves/their selves] *and mish'pat* [the perfect balance of wisdom and mercy which characterizes the mind and will of the Holy One].

How does a concept of *lashon ha ra* fit into this redefining life-focus? Hebraically, we know that the noun *lashon* [Strong's Hebrew word #3956] means 'tongue' in the sense of 'first language', or 'native speech'. See Genesis 10:5 for the first Torah usage of the word '*lashon*'. *Lashon* is thus that aspect of our speech that tells everyone of what kingdom we are from - where our citizenship is. *Lashon* is that

aspect of our conversation that reveals exactly *what culture is inside of us*, defining how we think, emote, and with what worldview we align.

We need to realize that every time we open our mouth to speak *we are broadcasting a whole lot more than words*. And the message we are communicating *may actually be the exact opposite of what the words we speak literally mean*. This may occur for a couple of reasons.

First of all, the message that we communicate may not be received accurately because the person to whom we are speaking *hails from and/or is most closely aligned with a different kingdom* [i.e. there is a 'language barrier']. We need to *invest some love in, pay attention to, perceive and understand and seek discernment concerning* the person[s] to whom we speak – especially about spiritual things. By way of example, we need to understand that shouting Bible verses and looking down our noses at persons strung out on drugs, immersed in a lifestyle and culture of sexual immorality, caught up in materialism, etc. is almost never going to communicate the message the Holy One wants them to *sh'ma*.

Secondly, the message that we communicate may not be received accurately because it may be because *the attitude, tone of voice, and body language we use speaks louder than the actual words we use*. As Yeshua taught in the Sermon on the Mount: “... *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*”

This brings us to the second aspect of the Hebrew phrase *lashon ha ra* - i.e. the '*ra*' modifier. What does '*ra*' mean? Shorthand Hebrew/English dictionary sources will tell you *ra* means '*evil*'. But that is really not very helpful, is it? So let's look a little deeper. *Ra* is a modifier described from the verb root *ra'ah*, spelled *resh*, *ayin*, *ayin* - meaning to make a noise causing something to break into pieces/shatter. From a Hebraic word picture standpoint, the *resh*, *ayin*, *ayin* mural is one of a person who is off the kingdom platform focusing energy or words intently on someone else's inner man/soul. Speech that is *ra* is thus speech that causes a person - be it the speaker, the hearer, or a third-person object of the speech - to cease to be whole, but to instead become fragmented in his heart, mind, and soul. *Lashon ha ra* stirs up/incites negative *thoughts, emotions, attitudes, and judgments*. *Lashon ha ra* thus represents any speech that involves dissecting another person – such as criticizing, condemning, or mocking them, their behavior, their motives, their character, or their appearance. *Lashon ha ra* is speech that addresses only at one aspect of another person's life without seeing and taking into account the whole picture. At the same time it is speech that applies a '*double standard*' and *hypocrisy* on the part of the one doing the dissecting - because that person does not consider the negative

aspects of his or her own life when making/announcing his or her judgments.

The Relationship Between Nega Tzara'at and Lashon Ha Ra

With this working Hebraic definition of *lashon ha ra* in mind let us take a look at the context of the Torah passage in which the sign of *tzara'at* was first given to see if we can resolve the question of how *lashon ha ra* and *tzara'at* are related. In Exodus 3-4 Moshe is having his very first “God encounter”. He started the day as a former prince, fugitive murderer turned shepherd, just wanting to find pasture for his father-in-law’s sheep. He saw a bush on fire, and wound up having a conversation with the Creator of the Universe. In the course of this conversation the Holy One tells Moshe to leave his peaceful life and go back to Egypt, assemble the elders of Israel and tell them God has heard their groaning and is going to deliver them. Then the Holy One tells him to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the Hebrew people go. How does Moshe respond to all this? Ah, that may be our first clue! The first thing Moshe says is: ***Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring B’nei Yisrael out of Egypt?***” Exodus 3:11.

What’s wrong with that, you may ask? Sounds very humble, doesn’t it? But this is not a conversation between men. The Holy One has just told Moshe ***“I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people B’nei Yisrael out of Egypt.”*** For Moshe to “play humble” in this context is to challenge the Holy One’s wisdom, and argue with His plan. But the Holy One is merciful. He does not strike Moshe down for his insolence. The conversation continues. As soon as the Holy One explains that He will be with Moshe (so it doesn’t really matter whether Moshe is qualified in men’s eyes, or his own), Moshe challenges the plan again: ***Suppose I go to B’nei Yisrael and say to them, ‘The God of our fathers has sent me to you.’ And they ask of me, ‘What is His Name?’ What shall I tell them?’*** Exodus 3:13.

In the course of racking his brain to find flaws in the plan and to convince the Holy One that the enterprise is hopeless, Moshe has insinuated that the people of Israel are so spiritually dead that they do not even remember the name of the God of their forefathers¹². This was *lashon ha ra* in its simplest, most seemingly innocuous form – saying something true, but negative, about someone else. Still the Holy One is patient. He answers the question and continues His instructions. Then Moshe counters:

***“What if they [the elders of Israel] do not believe me or listen to me,
and say ‘The Holy One did not appear to you’?”***
[Exodus 4:1]

¹² This may, of course, have been true – but that is not the point. The Holy One knew full well if this was or was not the case, and it did not affect His plan one whit.

Now Moshe has accused the elders of Israel of being close-minded and unwilling to listen – even though the Holy One has said He will personally be with Moshe when he speaks to them! Moshe has thus insulted both the Holy One (Whose persuasive ability is implicitly questioned) and the elders of Israel (about whose spiritual responsiveness Moshe has expressed grave doubts). And he doesn't know if what he says is true or false – he judges his brothers without all the facts. This is the second stage of *lashon ha ra* – *criticizing others' spiritual lives* when one does not have all the facts. So the Holy One decides to give Moshe some “shock therapy”. “Throw down your staff, Moshe! Grab that crocodile by the tail!” And finally He says, “Stick that hand inside your tunic, Moshe!” How do you like *nega tzara'at*? Any more complaints? [Rabbi's son paraphrase].

Are we hitting close to home yet? You check your skin and I'll check mine!

Nega Tzara'at As the Holy One's 'Shock Treatment'

In a people that is called to holiness, *lashon ha ra* – speaking negatively about others – is something the Holy One takes very seriously. In the apostolic writings Ya'akov [James] says it well:

*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men,
who have been made in the Holy One's likeness.
Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.
Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?"*

[James 3:9-11]

Yeshua expressed it even more bluntly:

*In the same way you judge others, you will be judged,
And with the measure you use it will be measured to you.
Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye
And pay no attention to the 2 x 4 [Rabbi's son paraphrase] in your own eye?"*

[Matthew 7:2-3]

The correlation between negative speech and *tzara'at* is made even more clear in Numbers 12:1-15. As you will recall, during the wanderings in the desert, Miryam and Aharon speak *lashon ha ra* concerning Moshe and his wife. Do you remember the result? Here is how Torah records what happens:

*Miryam and Aharon spoke against Moshe
because of the Kushite woman whom he had married;
for he had married a Kushite woman.
They said, Has the Holy One indeed spoken only with Moshe?
Hasn't he spoken also with us? The Holy One heard it.*

*The anger of the Holy One was kindled against them; and he departed.
The cloud removed from over the Tent;*

*and, behold, Miryam was tzara, as [white as] snow:
and Aharon looked at Miryam, and, behold, she was tzara.*

*Aharon said to Moshe, "Oh, my lord, please don't lay sin on us,
for that we have done foolishly, and for that we have sinned."*

*Miryam was shut up outside of the camp seven days:
and the people didn't travel until Miryam was brought in again.*

Why did the Holy One strike Miryam with *nega tzara`at*? Because of her critical speech and haughty attitude. The Holy One does not tolerate either. Both will be severely judged – especially in those who speak on his behalf. Gossip and back biting, tale bearing and judging, are not ‘little sins’ in the Holy One’s eyes. He does not say “*Tsk tsk, that’s not nice, so you shouldn’t do that!*” If we persist in evil speech we will pay a price – and it will be some form of public humiliation. And usually that public humiliation will occur right in front of the very people concerning whom we spoke evil things.

If the Bridegroom-King, in loving discipline, was not hesitant to give Moshe and Miryam a taste of *tzara`at* to get their attention and bring them back to an attitude of humble service out of the love of the Holy One and all people and things He has created ... well, how secure in your complexion are you and I? We are in the process of undergoing the Ultimate Divine Bridal Make-Over, and it is time for a lot of our flesh to fall on the cutting room floor.

Self-Examination Required

Please note however that the kohen was not to go out into the community looking for people with *tzara`at*, declaring “*unclean, unclean*” at people as he went. A person who does that is not a priest but a kind of self-appointed accuser of the brethren. *Tzara`at* is instead a condition which is supposed to be discovered by self-examination. Only after one had reason to suspect he had *tzara`at* was he to present himself to a kohen. The function of the kohen (and I am writing to a kingdom of *kohanim*, a holy nation) was/is to be an agent of healing for those desirous of ridding themselves of *tzara`at* - not an agent of condemnation.

The most important issue for us is not whether someone else we know speaks *lashon ha ra* or whether someone else we know has *tzara`at*. The question for each of us is whether we ourselves speak *lashon ha ra* or have - or deserve - *tzara`at*. And so I say to myself and to all of our Community of Faith - let us measure very carefully the words we use concerning other people the Holy One has created. Unless of course ... you have an affinity for shock treatment.

A Caveat

Keep in mind also that every *tamei* condition mentioned in Torah – including *tzara'at* - is considered to be curable. In our Divine Bridegroom's kingdom human life is precious, and human beings are never considered worthless or disposable. Within the framework of Torah, therefore, a way is provided for every single *tamei* person to be restored to wholeness. If therefore you know yourself to be presently afflicted with a skin condition, please do not despair. The Holy One knows your condition, its cause, its cure, and everything you are suffering very, very well. Rest assured that He is diligently keeping watch over you. Run to Him. Keep running to Him. If each time you try to approach Him He seems aloof, redouble your efforts, and run to Him even harder. Take a lesson from the woman with the issue of blood—who in the midst of her personal crisis sought Yeshua out, found Him, and grabbed hold of the tzit-tzit of Yeshua's garment. But please, in your quest for alleviation of pain and discomfort and embarrassment do not ever forget this one spiritual truth: as important as it is, the most important factor in this situation is not your getting healed – it is the glorification of the name of the Holy One. Make a conscious effort therefore to spend significantly more time *praising the Holy One, studying His Word, and meeting Messiah through engaging in mitzvot* than you spend thinking or talking about your illness or its symptoms.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Today's aliyah from parsha *Tazria* discusses the role of the descendants of Aharon in diagnosing and ministering to persons having a skin condition Torah calls *tzara'at*. In the King James Version this affliction is called “leprosy” – but as aforesaid it is not leprosy as we know it today. It is something different – something supernatural. Its major effect was not physical, but spiritual. Specifically, its main consequence was that it rendered a person *tamei*. As we learned yesterday that meant the person entered a state requiring enhanced spiritual vigilance which superseded community responsibilities and even regular religious observance. A person with this condition had an immediate need for an encounter with the Holy One. Hence, he was called away from matters of ordinary life and relationship to direct all his/her focus to that end.

[A] Summarize the duties of a *kohen* [priest] in dealing with a person with a skin condition that might be “*tzara'at*”?

[B] What periods of “*tamei*” were prescribed for every person with a suspicious skin condition?

[C] Once a person was checked out and found to be “o.k.”, what did he/she have to do to become *tahor* again?

[D] What, according to verses 45-46, was the lot in life of the man who indeed

had the condition *tzara`at*, and who did not receive healing?

2. In today's haftarah reading from II Kings a very influential man living outside the covenant community contracts a physical condition for which he seeks help from the prophets of the God of Israel. Although Na'aman may not have been a Hebrew, he had become involved with the covenant people through his military expeditions (i.e. slave raids) – and had even brought a Hebrew girl into his house, as a maidservant/slave for his wife. He apparently claimed (or at least received) the credit for success in military campaigns against Israel. He did not acknowledge that as our text tells us: ... *the Holy One had given victory to Aram*. II Kings 5:1.

The Holy One had given Na'aman victory over Israel in the days when the wicked and idolatrous Ahav and *Yehezevel* [Jezebel] were reigning in Samaria. All the honor for Na'aman's victory belonged to the Holy One, who was using Na'aman to discipline His backslidden people. By claiming/accepting for himself honor that belonged solely to the Holy One Na'aman brought upon himself the 'shock treatment' judgment of the Holy One, who chose to afflict His skin with *tzara`at*. He who had only recently been used by the Holy One as an instrument of discipline upon Israel now found himself a man marked by the Holy One.

Of course, none of the doctors of the gentile world could help Na'aman. The King who employed him to make raids into nearby countries (especially Israel) on his behalf was powerless to arrange his healing. But strangely enough there just happened to be a Hebrew slave girl who just happened to wind up in the man's house who understood far more than all the doctors of the gentile world combined – at least, about the subject of *tzara`at*. Na'aman is therefore in for an "encounter of the Garden kind"!

Now Na`aman, captain of the host of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the Holy One had given victory to Aram: he was also a mighty man of valor, [but he was] a metzora [i.e. he had tzara`at]

The Aram had gone out in bands, and had brought away captive out of Eretz-Yisra'el a little maiden; and she waited on Na`aman's wife.

She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Shomron! then would he recover him of his tzara`at."

[II Kings 5:1-3]

[A] The name Na'aman is from the same Hebrew verb root as the name Naomi [from the Book of Ruth]. Look up the verb root of those two names, write it in Hebrew letters with vowel markings, and describe the Hebraic word picture you see developing around that word.

[B] What health condition did Na'aman have?

[C] How did the King of Israel react when Na'aman came with his message from the King of Aram [Syria]?

- [D] What was Elisha's reaction when he found out?
- [E] Did Elisha, the prophet, meet with Na'aman?
- [F] Why was Na'aman angry?
- [G] How did Na'aman expect Elisha to try to heal him?
- [H] What had to happen in Na'aman before he could be healed?

3. In the B'rit Chadasha reading I have selected for today Yeshua, who was neither a priest after the order of Aharon nor a prophet after the order of Elisha, also dealt with persons who had what our English Bibles translate as "leprosy". Here is what *Mattitiyahu* [Matthew] tells us about one such encounter:

*When he [Yeshua] came down from the mountain great multitudes followed him.
Behold, a man with tzara'at came to him and worshiped him,
saying, "Adon, if you want to you can make me tahor."
Yeshua stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, "I want to. Be tahor."
Immediately his tzara'at was cleansed.
Yeshua said to him, "See that you tell nobody, but go, show yourself to the Kohen,
and offer the gift that Moshe commanded, as a testimony to them."
[Matthew 8:1-4]*

[A] What did Yeshua do that was different from what the Aharonic priest would do?

[B] What did Yeshua do that was different from what Elisha did?

May our mouths ever be springs of living water – never a fountain of the poison of lashon ha ra.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

II Kings 15:1-7 [The King With Tzara'at]

*In the twenty-seventh year of Yarov'am [Jeroboam] king of Yisra'el
began 'Azaryah son of Amatzyah king of Y'hudah to reign.
Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign;
and he reigned fifty-two years in Y'rushalayim:
and his mother's name was Yekholyahu of Y'rushalayim.
He did that which was right in the eyes of the Holy One,
according to all that his father Amatzyah had done; However the high places
were not taken away - the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.
The Holy One struck the king, so that he was a metzora
to the day of his death, and lived in a separate house.
Yotam the king's son was over the household, judging the people of the land.
Now the rest of the acts of 'Azaryah, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book
of the chronicles of the kings of Y'hudah? 'Azaryah slept with his fathers;
and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David:
and Yotam his son reigned in his place.*