

Shiur L'Yom Revi'i¹

[Wednesday's Study]

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|-----------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| READINGS: | Torah Tazria: | Leviticus 13:29-59 |
| | Haftarah: | II Kings 5:15-27 |
| | B'rit Chadasha: | Luke 12:22-36 |

The priest is to examine the mildew

[Leviticus 13:50]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 97-104;

This Week's Amidah prayer is Petition No. 1, *Da'at* [the Petition for Knowledge]

V'ish o ishah – If/when a man or woman ... *ki yiyeh bo naga* - has a sore come up ...
b'rosh o b'zakan - on the head or the beard **Leviticus 13:29.**

The Holy One is exquisitely skillful, incomparably wise, and unflinchingly good. He does all things well. He knows where to put, what to do with, and how to bring out the best in everything and each human being that He has made. He knows what will sustain and nurture every facet of His Creation – and what tends instead to throw things off trajectory and thereby introduce toxicity. He knows how to establish and maintain the delicate balance He has established between offsetting realms like *darkness and light, chaos and order, what is seen and what is unseen, what is becoming whole and what is fragmenting, and what He can let go on in the foreground and what He is bringing to pass in the background.* He knows what is *healthy* - and what is *toxic* - *for mankind.* He is also kind, longsuffering, faithful to covenant, and gracious. He is the farthest thing from a cruel taskmaster you will ever see. His Torah, therefore, is wonderful, wise, and gentle. It is as full of mercy and grace as it is full of Fatherly advice and counsel. Every syllable of each story in every narrative of Torah, as well as every single Hebrew letter of every single Divine Pronouncement thereof, contains a *precious, precious gift* that the Holy One has decided to bestow upon mankind. Each one emanates from the twin fountains of His Great Wisdom and His Great Love. See **Psalm 19:7-11.** Torah's instructions for a well-lived life are therefore not a burdensome system of laws; they are a beautiful Divinely illuminated pathway of life, health and peace. The wise man runs to embrace them. See **Psalm 119:12, 18, 20, 24, 35 and 47.** No one in their right mind would seek to avoid or escape them.

Through His Torah the Holy One invites – and promises to empower - all persons who will enter Covenant with Him to become *people of ever-increasing beauty and purity.* Torah is His protocol for the Ultimate Divine Bridal Make-Over

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through which He intends to transform ordinary human beings like us from a motley crew of self-centered slaves and shrews to a fitting helpmeet for Himself – a Bride without spot, wrinkle, blemish, or any such thing. **Psalm 119:9, 11, 97-105.** We can – and should - therefore embrace the Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover protocols of *Sefer Vayikra* with complete confidence that they are intended for, and will invariably result in, our – and the world's - good.

Recently the focus of the Bridegroom-King's makeover protocols turned from the Bride-to-be's skin to her *hair*. So ... what kind of hair day are you having, dear friend?

How Are Your Antennae Working?

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as 'hair' is *se'ar*². This noun is etymologically derived from a verb root meaning to *shudder, quiver, or vibrate* – particularly *in response to stimuli*. The patches of hair that the Holy One has caused to grow on our bodies are not designed primarily for warmth. Neither are they primarily for adornment. The hair our Creator has given us is designed to function for us the way antennae function for insects. Everywhere on our body our hair grows it functions as our 'feeler', or antennae. It is very sensitive to external stimuli. In the natural realm, our hair senses heat, moisture, wind, touch, and even danger. It therefore constitutes our body's first line of reception for those and many other sensations. When our hair receives an external stimulus it reacts with a sensation. The hair then conducts the sensation it has received to our hair follicles, and into the surrounding skin. The skin then conducts the sensation we received through our hair to the closest nearby nerve endings. The affected nerve endings then conduct the sensation to our brains for further processing.

Today's aliyah is primarily about the effect of prolonged exposure to the *tamei* realm upon our hair, and more specifically, upon the effect of persistent or high doses of the toxicity of *tumah* upon the follicles and skin out of which our hair grows. Our hair is an *organ of spiritual as well as physical discernment*. Not only does it react to wind, heat, moisture, touch, and physical danger; it is also programmed to react very differently to the presence of that which is *kadosh* [i.e. that which is holy; surrendered to the will, plan, and purposes of the Creator] than it does to that which is *chol* [i.e. common, profane] and to respond differently to that which is *tahor* than it does to that which is *tamei*. I call it the '*pleasant tingle*' phenomenon and the '*unpleasant crawl*' phenomenon. Think of how a cat's hair stands on end when in an agitated state, or how a dog's hair reacts to a perceived threat, and you will get the picture.

² *Se'ar* is *sin, ayin, resh*. Strong's Hebrew word # 8181, it is pronounced *seh-ahr*'.

If we know how to *sh'ma*, allow our Bridegroom-King to train us in responsiveness and discernment, and to not damage or cover up our hair's receptors, our hair follicles will always alert us when we are in the flow of the Holy One's retinue. And they will also alert us when we are entering an area or dealing with a person, stepping into a conversation, or approaching a situation in which unclean spirits are engaged in doing what they do – which is to play with human emotions, re-open old wounds, offenses, and prejudices, stir up unhealthy fleshly human appetites, urges and desires, and dump toxic forms of *tumah* all over our minds, souls, bodies, conversations, and relationships. As our aliyah tells us, therefore:

*If a man or woman has a lesion on the head or the beard, the kohen is to examine the sore;
and if it [i.e. the lesion] appears deeper than the skin,
and there is thin yellow hair [Hebrew se'ar tzahov daq] in it,
then the kohen is to pronounce him tamei.*

*It is a neteq [i.e. a pulling away] tzara'at of the head or beard.
[Leviticus 13:29-30]*

The *tamei* realm almost always comes with signs. With animals the sign is failure to chew the cud and part the hoof. With aquatic creatures the sign is failure to have both fins and scales. With *neteq tzara'at* – the result of *tumah* overload on the skin in areas with hair coverage - the sign is the presence of both *a depression in the skin at the site of the lesion* and *a thin yellow* - in this case, obviously unhealthy - *hair*. The presence of either sign is evidence of a *tumah* insult; when both signs are present at the same time, it means the *tumah* is so established in the person that their status transcends the level of *tamei* and has instead reached the advanced, far more toxic, stage of *tzara'at*. Our English Bibles call this condition leprosy – but as we have discussed previously, this is not the condition that western civilization's writers and moviemakers have romanticized where fingers, toes, and faces fall off. *Tzara'at* is not a physically contagious disease. It is not spread by physical contact or bodily fluids. It is instead a spiritual condition. It is spread by negative words, toxic attitudes, arrogant opinions, fleshly lusts, and the obsessive behaviors and over-reaction patterns that flow from and are intimately associated with each.

If upon intimate inspection the *kohen* - and of course, at this stage of the studies the reader should see Messiah as the ultimate *kohen* to whom we offer ourselves for inspection - sees only the sign of a depression, while the hair in the affected area remains its normal color and appearance, the presence of a depression in the skin just means we are placed on a state of special alert. The *kohen* commits to leave the camp secretly and come visit us twice more, in love and compassion. As our aliyah tells us:

*If when the kohen examines the scaly sore,
it does not appear deeper than the skin, and there is no black hair in it,
then the kohen is to isolate the one who has the neteq tzara'at for seven days.*

*And on the seventh day the kohen is to examine the sore;
 and indeed if the scale has not spread,
 and there is no yellow hair in it, and the scale does not appear deeper than the skin,
 he is to shave himself, but the area of the scale he is not to shave.
 And the kohen is to isolate the one who has the scale another seven days.
 On the seventh day the kohen is to examine the scale;
 and if the scale has not spread over the skin, and does not appear deeper than the skin,
 then the kohen is to pronounce the person tahor [i.e. clean].
 He [i.e. the affected individual] is to wash his clothes and he will be tahor.
 But if the scale should at all spread over the skin after his cleansing,
 then the priest shall examine him; and indeed if the scale has spread over the skin,
 the priest need not seek for yellow hair. He is tamei.
 But if the scale appears to be at a standstill,
 and there is black hair grown up in it, the scale has healed.
 He is tahor, and the kohen is to pronounce him tahor.*
 [Leviticus 13:31 ff]

With the Holy One the goal – and the promise of the Covenant – is always that if we will join Him in the protocols of healing, He will restore us to wholeness in the proper time. He is not punishing us. He is not wounding us. He is healing us. He is restoring us. He is preparing us to be a fitting co-regent, who will represent His Wholeness and function in all the organs of spiritual discernment with which He equipped us.

And Then, There are the Stubborn, Hard-to-Remediate Cases

The Holy One knows that *tamei* spirits and *tzara'at* have to have a bed of active *tumah* to inhabit in order to thrive. As soon as there is no active fountain of *tumah* flow with which to wreak havoc, the unclean spirit will quickly flee for 'greener pastures', and the *tzara'at* will dry up. The Holy One wants to make us all 'no fly' zones, not just for *tumah*, but also for the unclean spirits that come with *tumah*. He therefore offers us all a way to 'pull the rug' out from under the *tzara'at* and the unclean spirits that are drawn like flies to the areas where *tumah* is at work in us. The Holy One is fully cognizant, however, that not everyone who has *tumah*, *tzara'at*, or a *tamei spirit* will respond to His prescribed restorative processes. He knows that some of us will choose another way. He knows some will simply ignore all the warning signs. He knows others will choose the path of self-righteousness, and refuse to go to the *kohen*. They will swallow the serpent's lie that they can handle high levels of insults from and infiltration by *tumah* alone hook, line, and sinker. If any one of those is the person's choice, the Holy One is still merciful. He offers one last, far more drastic, form of treatment. Our aliyah today therefore says:

*Now the metzora on whom the sore remains [i.e. the one with an active, toxic tzara'at process in place after all the other protocols have been exhausted; i.e. the unresponsive one; the leper],
 his clothes are to be torn and his head is to be left uncovered;*

and he is to cover his mustache, and cry, 'Tamei! Tamei!' [i.e. Unclean! Unclean!']

He is tamei. All the days he has the sore he remains tamei.

As long as he is tamei, he is to dwell alone; his dwelling is to be outside the camp.

Please note, however, that there is hope – and expectation of healing and restoration – even for the ‘hard to receive’ person who will not respond to the loving call of the Bridegroom-King to come to the Garden Pathway and be healed. Even for such a person. The Holy One declares that the *tzara’at* that person has embraced does not have to be a permanent condition. But once he has become toxic to everyone around him, the person is required to overcome his negativity, renounce his self-righteousness, discard his pride, and humbly surrender to the Holy One’s healing Hand. Please note also that it is the affected person himself – not someone else – that is always to cry ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ It is not our job to judge or label the *metzora* or any other person. The cry ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ is a cry of the broken and contrite heart – and is a necessary component of the level of extreme of humility that is necessary for healing, and taking responsibility for the messes one has himself created. As Yeshua of Natzret put it: ***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*** Matthew 5:3.

Why does a person with longstanding *tzara’at* have to move outside the camp of the Redeemed? Because this particular level of *tumah* only comes from embracing *tumah* in substantial, unabated doses over a long period of time – and then resisting the Holy One’s loving calls to and protocols for healing. Until a person who has chosen such a path is willing to acknowledge, make *t’shuvah* concerning, and voluntarily abandon these levels of attitude and behavior, any contact he or she might have with the rest of the Redeemed Community would be adverse and toxic beyond imagination. They therefore leave the Holy One no choice but to quarantine them for the sake of the Covenant and the greater purposes of the Grand Redemptive Plan. At all times, however, the key to restoration lies in their own hands.

The natural product of ever-increasing consecration to the Holy One and ever-increasing immersion in His Word and His Ways

The most significant of the changes the Holy One intends to bring about in us through the Ultimate Divine Bridal Makeover protocols of *Sefer Vayikra* are internal. Merely changing the inside of us, however, will not be enough to accomplish His lofty Purposes for us. Everything about the outside of us must also to testify to the world of the transformative effect of our Bridegroom-King’s amazing wisdom, kindness, purity, grace, and love. He therefore sets out to change the *outside* of us as well as the inside of us. To demonstrate His Manifest Wisdom, Power, and Artistry the beauty and purity He is calling forth from His Beloved ones simply must be both *internal* and *external*.

So ... are the meditations of your heart and the thoughts of your mind ever increasing in beauty and wisdom? Are the words of your mouth and the expressions of your face toward others ever-increasing in beauty and grace? Are the garments and ornaments you wear ever increasing in beauty and modesty? And is your dwelling place ever increasing in beauty and hospitality? ***Mah tovu ohalecha Ya'akov, mishkanotecha Yisra'el?*** [How lovely are your tents, O Jacob – your dwelling places, Israel?]

What is our part in the process the Holy One has set in motion for internal and external transformation? It is our inestimable privilege to actually cooperate with Him and with His Make-Over protocol *on both internal and external level*. Neither the beauty nor the purity He calls forth from us is something we must create – His Words of Life themselves are fully capable of accomplishing this in us. All He calls forth from us is respect and some cooperation. Why on earth would we not respect Him Who has done so much for us? Why in the world would we not want to cooperate with Him? Ah Beloved, it seems there is *a little bit of slave and a whole lot of shrew* in the best of us.

Setting Free the Slave and Taming the Shrew

To illustrate my point let me engage you for a few moments with a parable. Imagine a lowly girl of the common people of a country who - miracle of miracles – wins a lottery of some kind and becomes betrothed to marry that country's king. Imagine the fully committed, delightfully enamored king sending the lowly commoner a wardrobe of beautiful dresses, veils and tiaras, jewelry and accessories -- things fitting for a queen for her to choose from for not only the wedding day but also for her new life as co-regent of his beloved people. Imagine him sending along with those wardrobes the best hairdressers, manicurists, fashion consultants, and life-coaches in his kingdom to help her prepare for their wedding and the glorious life He has planned for them to enjoy together. Now imagine her sending away those who bring the precious treasures the king has had made for her and all of the attendants he has sent for her, with a toss of her head and saying: *“NO, NO, NO! Take all those burdensome things and all those bothersome people away right now! How dare the king try to change the way I look and act! Doesn't he know that I am free from the law? Isn't it enough for him that I know his name and believe he loves me and has forgiven me of my sins? I will take his name if that's what he wants, but I heard somebody down at the night club I frequent say I don't have to look like, act like, or talk like a bride or queen anymore because that's all 'old covenant' stuff of yesteryear. Hasn't the king heard? So I'll just go on wearing my tattered old blue jeans, my crop-top t-shirt, my floppy gardening hat and my flip-flops. Oh, and be sure to tell the king not to call me anymore. Tell him that if I need him for any reason, I'll be sure to call him.”*

Each instruction/injunction of Torah is designed to function like seed. It is deposited in us and then starts in its work in us in our innermost being. But before it is over, it is designed to change the exterior as well. Similarly, as we have been discussing in these studies the Words of the Holy One in the Book of Leviticus set forth the *official protocol for the ultimate extreme makeover* that the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven has arranged for His Bride to undergo. Every extreme make-over involves not only the way one thinks about herself, but also her diet, body, and self-image, and *wardrobe*.

Are Your Garments Spotless?

A bride must have *a trousseau fitting for her wedding day and her honeymoon*. And of course all the garments of that trousseau should be *without spot or wrinkle* or any such thing. Hence today's aliyah deals with *detecting and eliminating potential problems with the clothing/garments of the people in the Holy One's redeemed community*.

As the *Kedusha Discourse* starts to get intense, the Holy One instructs us what to do when we find something our English Bibles call “the *plague of mildew*” [KJV] in the garments we wear. As Torah puts it:

Zot torat nega-tzara'at beged ha-tzemer o ha-pishtim
This is the torah of the plague of mildew in a garment of wool or linen,
o ha-sh'ti o ha-erev o kol-keli-or l'taharo o l'tam'o
either in the warp, or the woof, or in anything of leather ...
[Leviticus 13:59]

Get ready for another form of the Holy One's Divine shock treatment. This time it is going to involve the garments we wear when we go forth to represent our King and His Kingdom in the world. The Hebrew term the English translators render as “*plague of mildew*” is ***nega tzara'at*** - a phrase consisting of the word *nega*³, followed by the word *tzara'at*. This Hebrew word draws a picture of something being struck, or “marked” with an identifying mark – a spot or stripe of *tzara'at*. The first word in the operative phrase, *nega*, is derived from the verb root ***naga***⁴, meaning “*to strike with a disease*”. The first Biblical usage of the word ***naga*** is in Genesis 12:17, where Torah tells us:

And the Holy One plagued [*naga*] ***Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Avram's wife.***

Another illustrative example of the Biblical usage of this Hebrew concept is found in the Pesach story, in Exodus 12:22:

And you are to take a bunch of hyssop,

³ *Nega* is *nun, gimel, ayin*, Strong's Hebrew word #5061, pronounced ***neh'-gah***.

⁴ *Naga* is Strong's Hebrew word #5060.

*and dip [it] in the blood that [is] in the basin,
and strike [naga] the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that [is] in the basin”*

Also consider one of the most famous usages of this word, in Isaiah 53:4, 8:

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows:
yet we did esteem him stricken [naga], smitten of God, and afflicted .*

* * *

*He was taken from prison and from judgment:
and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living:
for the transgression of my people was he stricken [naga].*

If you have been studying this week you have already found that what our English Bible’s translate as “leprosy” is not the condition we know as leprosy today, but a supernatural skin condition with which persons within the redeemed community (or otherwise closely related to the Holy One, as was Na’aman the Syrian) were stricken by the Holy One, usually as a form of loving discipline (with a redemptive purpose) when they habitually indulged in attitudes, speech, and behavior inconsistent with their redeemed nature. It was not a ghastly terror, as some might suppose, but an expression of the Holy One’s love and His desire to heal and restore. In a community of people living constantly in the Presence of the Holy One, it was (and is) to be expected, and cherished, as an evidence of His love. It *offends the mind to reveal the heart*. That is the Holy One’s way.

The absence of the supernatural condition of *tzara’at* from the redeemed community today – if indeed it is truly absent - is probably *evidence that we really do not live constantly in His Presence*⁵.

What is This Thing Our English Bibles Call ‘Mildew’?

What we know as “mildew” today can be defined as “*a growth caused by micro-organisms, whose spores, in a moist, warm environment, become molds*”, and which “*during their growth produce acids*” that “*can damage paper, leather, cloth, etc.*”; which “*at times produce color bodies, leading to staining which is difficult to remove*. Certain types of fungi - i.e. those that produce branching filaments - are classified as “mold”. When a mold [a microscopic organism] attaches itself to a fabric,

⁵ Those of us who have joined our lives with Messiah and received the indwelling of the *Ruach* [Spirit/Breath] of the Almighty, should, theoretically, be even closer to the Holy One, and more susceptible to *tzara’at*, than were the Redeemed in the desert; that is not, however, always the case. The indwelling presence of the Holy One, you see, is not necessarily a MANIFEST presence. One of the elemental corollaries of the spiritual truth of the Holy One’s omnipresence is that the Holy One can be *present but hidden*. The Holy One is everywhere – yet He is **seen** only where and when He chooses, for His own Divine purposes, to make His Presence *manifest*. What does that mean for us? It means that, until Messiah comes with His clouds in radiant glory, the only Divine indwelling we will be able to experience will remain the indwelling of His *Hidden Presence*. Our faces will not glow as did the faces of Moshe and Stephen. Our bodies will not be transfigured in the sight of men. And most of us will not know the precious gift of *tzara’at*-type discipline.

it secretes acid-like enzymes that begin to break down the structure of the fabric. The mold then begins to eat away at the broken-down fabric. This starts in motion a process that, if not halted, will eventually result in visible damage to the fabric. The damaged area is called “*mildew*”.

Mildew is a *condition*, not a cause. The cause is always *mold*. The mold secretes the acid-like enzymes, making spots on whatever it is attached to. That is ‘mildew’ Mildew is just the visible evidence of the presence and destructive activity of mold. It usually appears – at least initially - in the form of spots. Generally the spots are black. Occasionally, however, they ***Strike the Possessions*** present themselves as white, rust colored, or greenish.

Is “Mildew” As We Know It In the 21st Century What Torah is Talking About?

Most people who read Leviticus in English automatically associate the “*plague of mildew*” about which we read in today’s aliyah with mold-generated damage, as described above. This is a natural assumption, but one that is unjustified. The English word “mildew” is merely an English “approximation” for the Hebrew term is *nega tzara’at*, meaning “*tzara’at-stricken* object or thing”. The subject of the aliyah is not mold-generated growth – i.e. commonplace “*mildew*” as we know it - but a supernatural condition, brought about not by warm, damp, musty conditions (unlikely to be encountered by the desert-dwelling children of Yisrael), but by the Holy One.

Why Would the Holy One Expose Tzara’at In the Possessions/Garments of His People?

Why would the Holy One, in loving discipline, with a redemptive purpose, expose hidden *tzara’at* in the garment of a person in the redeemed community? What, by revealing a “mildew-like” spot or splotch in a person’s garment, would the Holy One be saying to and/or about that person? What kind of training protocol would this be? What would an ugly splotch or spot growing on our tunic or sandals [now, our blue jeans and tennis shoes] mean for us *spiritually*? To answer these questions we must come to an understanding as to what a “garment” is. The word our English words translate as “clothing” or “garment” is *begeg*⁶. This is a masculine noun meaning “*garment, raiment, apparel, or clothing*, in the context of a *covering of nakedness*. This is very important, as we will see throughout the Torah, the prophets, and the apostolic writings of the followers of Yeshua (especially the wedding feast parable and the book of Revelation) an emphasis on the “garments” of the redeemed. Our garments represent outward expressions of our inward spiritual state.

⁶ Beged is *beit, gimel, dalet*), Strong’s Hebrew word #899, pronounced *behg’-ed*.

We as a redeemed community are to have *spotless* garments, of pure white linen, representing an inward spiritual state of kadosh – holiness and sanctification to the Holy One. A bride traditionally wears white. Why? To symbolize her purity. So if, when a bride-to-be is putting on her wedding dress, she looks down at the waistline and sees an ugly brownish-green splotch growing there, what happens? In today's world, it would result in a panicked emergency call to the dry cleaners. But – could contamination of one's clothes by such a spot also *convey a spiritual message*? And if *tzara'at* on one's skin comes, as we learned yesterday, as a warning from the Holy One to a person who will not stop speaking *lashon ha ra* [critical, negative speech], what kind of impropriety would cause the Holy One to send the *nega tzara'at* on one's garments?

Generally, therefore, it appears that the Holy One lovingly strikes a person's garments and personal belongings with *nega* as a form of discipline designed to root out *a potentially-lethal attitude or sin pattern* which the person has, over a period of time, accepted as a part of his or her life, *but which he or she has attempted to "cover over" and conceal [begeg] by outward behavior patterns which he or she intends to make others (and sometimes himself/ herself!) think he or she is "holy"*.

Masters of Spiritual Disguise

An extreme physical example of such a cover-up from our secular society would be one who wears sunglasses to hide bloodshot eyes or dilated pupils from alcohol or drug use, or one who wears long-sleeves in order to cover needle "tracks". A Torah example is the story of Genesis 27, where Ya'akov dresses in Esav's garments for the specific purpose of deceiving Yitzchak.

In the times of Messiah Yeshua spoke of some of the religious leaders of the day as "*whited sepulchers*" [NIV, whitewashed graves].

***Woe to you, Sofrim and Perushim, hypocrites!
For you are like whitened tombs which outwardly appear beautiful
but inwardly are full of dead men's bones, and of all kinds of things which render one tamei.
Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men,
but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.***

[Matthew 23:27-28]

In another place we read:

***In the hearing of all the people, he [Yeshua] said to his talmidim,
"Beware of the Sofrim, who like to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces,
the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts;
who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers:
these will receive greater condemnation".***

[Luke 20:45-47]

Based upon these teachings of Yeshua one could surmise that splotches of *tzara'at* on one's garments would be related to *hypocrisy* and *hidden sin* – i.e. things we try to cover up with outward shows of piety- just as *tzara'at* lesions on one's skin are related to *lashon ha ra*?

When one lives in the Holy One's presence, under His *Radiant* Cloud, one cannot long cover up selfishness and "hidden sin". That is what the Infilling of the Holy Spirit is supposed to be like, isn't it? The Holy One is more concerned with the condition of our hearts and the purity of our thought-life than with all the stuff others might see us doing "for the sake of His Kingdom". He wants to make sure we recognize that it is not fitting for a "holy nation", called to be a "light to the gentiles" to try to fool ourselves and the world by hiding bad attitudes and selfishness in one's heart behind visible acts of piety.

The "garments" [*mitzvot*] which we as members of the Redeemed Community are called to "put on" *should* accurately reflect who we are. They should not be used to *present a false image or mirage* – a picture which we want others to see but which does not reflect who we really are. Considering the consequences - to us and to the world – of our misrepresenting our King so badly, would it not be the grace of the Holy One to reveal such hypocrisy through *nega tzara'at* - on our clothing or elsewhere?

Why Are You Looking At Me Like That?

Please take care not to misunderstand or misapply this teaching. Alas, it is easy to do both! Keep in mind at all times that it is not the job of anyone in the Redeemed Community - including you or me - to go around with a critical eye, judging the worship practices and religious observances of everybody he or she knows, and declaring *nega tzara'at*. That condition, like *tzara'at* lesions on the skin, is intended to be self-diagnosed.

The responsibility of a priest - and we are, after all, a kingdom of priests - is to respond mercifully, caringly, and appropriately to all who recognize *nega* or *tzara'at* in their own lives, and who come in repentance seeking cleansing.

As Shaul of Tarsus said, *let no man judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. Colossians 2:16*. Do you judge others on the basis of such external factors? Do you judge persons more "observant" of Torah than you in regard to such externals as "legalistic", and those less observant of Torah than you in regard to such things as "lawless"?

Shaul also said: *Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels* [mere messengers – heavenly or earthly] *declare you disqualified you from the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by the ligaments and sinews, grows as the Holy One causes it to grow* [a clear reference to the prophecy of Ezekiel 37 – the dry bones prophecy].” **Colossians 2:18.**

Let no man judge you on externals Beloved. But likewise, *be sure you judge no one else on such things*. The point of being a priest of the Holy One is not to become a *judge of the people around us*; it is to serve and *mediate on behalf of them*. Offer the gift of life – the cleansing waters of Torah – and not the dagger of death, to all who come your way.

You check your garments for *nega tzara’at*, and I’ll check mine.

Applying the Principles of Today’s Aliyah to A World Without a Mish’kan

Alas, today the Radiant Cloud does not presently dwell in the midst of our camp. We have no *Mish’kan* and no functioning Aharonic Priesthood. The cultures in which we live are definitely not the Torah-based communities envisioned by Torah. Though millions in our world claim to be indwelt by the *Ruach HaQodesh*, all too often the *Manifest Presence* of the Almighty is nowhere to be seen. *Ergo*: neither we, nor anyone we know, is likely to develop *tzara’at* skin lesions or *nega tzara’at* spots on their garments in the environment in which we live anytime soon.

So what do we do with the Torah truths we read at the conclusion of parsha *Tazria* today? Is today’s study just an academic exercise? Some say “yes”, and turn the page. I say “*not so fast*”. The Holy One’s words are life, and contain life and power. The life and the power they contain is not limited to Torah-observant communities with functioning Aharonic Priests and visible pillars of fire and cloud. The life and power that the Holy One breathed into Torah is always applicable, always *tov* - i.e. good, and continually producing concentric levels of good things in our lives, like a pebble thrown into a pond not only disturbs the surface where it makes contact, but also produces ripples after ripple, all the way to the shore]. Hence even though our garments may not sprout “mildew”-looking growths if we persist in lives of hypocrisy and/or false humility, we can be assured, by the principles set forth in today’s torah, that *the Holy One will not allow us to get away with such things forever*. The Holy One may not strike us we who claim to be His with *tzara’at lesions*, or cause our garments to erupt with “mildew”-like growth – but because we are His, He will reveal hidden sins of which we refuse to

let go after He has warned us to do so.

Our Bridegroom-King loves us, so He always gives us a number of chances to acknowledge our sins and submit them to Him for cleansing. If we do not heed His calls, however, and if we choose to cling to our secret sins instead of running to Him, all the while putting on a show of piety for the world to see – well, if we do that *He will most certainly expose us publicly in one way or another*. You can take it to the bank. So walk circumspectly, Beloved. Deal with the secret sins, the hidden self-righteousness and pride, deep within. Do not worry about “who’s doing what to who” out in your neighborhood or in the political or economic culture in which we temporarily reside. Let the Holy One take care of that. Our time is better spent focusing on cleansing our lives of hidden sins – before the Holy One publicly exposes them so we have to deal with them in humility rather than in pride.

The spiritual forms of *nega* and *tzara’at* employed by the Holy One today are even more devastating than lesions and spots. As Job taught us:

*He leads Kohanim away stripped, and overthrows the mighty.
He removes the speech of those who are trusted,
And takes away the understanding of the Zakenim.
He pours contempt on princes and loosens the belt of the strong.
He uncovers deep things out of darkness and brings out to light the shadow of death.*
[Job 12:19-22]⁷

Let us *humble ourselves before the Holy One*, and be healed. It is time to return to a *lifestyle built upon the reverent fear of our Holy God*.

Questions For Today’ Study

1. Let us explore this Hebraic concept of “garments” – which can reveal who you are, conceal who you are, or actually project a false image you want others to believe represents who you are -- through consideration of the garments/clothing prevalent in today’s society. For the types of clothing a person, or a generation, or a society, wears, says a lot about who they are (or want others to believe they are). In the 60’s we wore tattered jeans, “love beads”, tie-die T-shirts, Nehru jackets, and sandals. In the 70’s we wore the “layered look”, complete with leisure suits and elevator lift shoes. In the 80s we wore suspenders, button-fly jeans, and bulky team-emblem jackets. In the 90’s girls bared their midriffs and wore mini-skirts, very short shorts, and dresses slit up the side, while boys wore caps pulled down tight over their heads, tight T-

⁷ See also Malachi 2:2-3, where the Holy One says to the *Kohanim*: *“If you will not sh’ma, and if you will not lay [it] to heart, to give glory unto my name, says the Holy One of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: indeed, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay [it] to heart. Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, [even] the dung from your solemn feasts; and [one] will take you away with it.”*

shirts, and baggy pants. In the 00's and teens most dress according to our favorite nostalgia movement, deliberately choosing to wear clothes from whatever previous era suits their fancy at the time. Each popular fashion has its message. Each garment you buy is a billboard. So ... what are *you* advertising?

[A] Your “garments” consist of the clothes you wear. What do the clothes you like to wear say about who you are?

[B] What is it about the clothes you like to wear that causes you to like them?

[C] Is there anything about the clothes you like the most that is inconsistent with your redeemed nature?

[D] What “message” do the clothes you like to wear send to those who see you?

[E] Is any part of the “message” those clothes send inconsistent with who the Holy One created you to be?

2. Let us move now beyond discussions of physical “clothing” to the realm of spiritual “clothing” -- religious activity done in public (activities we often call “worship”, prayers spoken in public, etc., giving of alms/tithes, communal fasts, etc.). Read Matthew 6:1-18 (that portion of the Sermon on the Mount where Yeshua specifically deals with such “spiritual garments”. Then read Luke 20:45-47, where Yeshua warns the people concerning some whose spiritual garments conceal and distort their personality, and Matthew 23:23-28 where Yeshua pronounced judgment on such persons. Write a one-page essay discussing what spiritual garments we should and should not ‘put on’, and what the garments we should put on should reveal about us.

3. Looking at the specifics of today’s aliyah we read:

The garment also that the nega of tzara'at is in, whether it is a woolen garment, or a linen garment; whether it is in warp, or woof; of linen, or of wool; whether in a skin, or in anything made of skin; if the nega is greenish or reddish in the garment ... it is the nega of tzara'at, and is to be shown to the Kohen.

The Kohen is to examine the nega, and isolate the nega seven days. He is to examine the nega on the seventh day.

If the nega has spread in the garment ... , the nega is a destructive nega. It is tamei. He is to burn the garment ... in which is the nega: for it is a destructive nega. It is to be burned in the fire.

"If the Kohen examines it, and, behold, the nega hasn't spread in the garment ... ; then the Kohen is to command that they wash the thing in which the nega is, and he is to isolate it seven more days.

Then the Kohen is to examine it, after the nega is washed; and, behold, if the nega hasn't changed its color, and the nega hasn't spread, it is tamei; you are to burn it in the fire.

*It is a tzara'at spot, whether the bareness is inside or outside.
 If the Kohen looks, and, behold, the nega has faded after it is washed,
 then he is to tear it out of the garment ...,
 and if it appears again in the garment ... it is spreading.
 You are to burn with fire that in which the nega is.
 The garment ... that you are to wash, if the nega has departed from them,
 then it is to be washed the second time, and it will be tahor."*

[A] What two colors indicate that “nega” is spreading and must be shown to the priest?

[B] Under what circumstances does Torah direct that the article stricken with nega be washed?

[C] Under what circumstances does Torah direct that the article be burnt?

[D] List the various types of material that this passage says can be affected by nega, and to which these instructions apply.

5. In II Kings 5 Na'aman, an Aramean God-fearer through whom the Holy One had given victory to the people of Aram, has just been miraculously healed of tzara'at. Now we read “the rest of the story”. Through the most unlikely of encounters, Gehazi's secret sin is about to be revealed. Perhaps the whole incident was less about Na'aman and his tzara'at than it was about Gehazi, the servant and confidante of the prophet Elisha, and his secret sin of covetousness.

*He [Na'aman] returned to the man of God, he and all his company,
 and came, and stood before him;
 and he said, “See now, I know that there is no God in all the eretz, but in Yisra'el:
 now therefore, please take a present from your servant.” But he [Elisha] said,
 “As the Holy One lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none.”*

*He urged him to take it; but he refused.
 Na'aman said, If not, yet, please let there be given to your servant
 two mules' burden of eretz; for your servant will henceforth offer neither korban olah
 nor sacrifice to other gods, but to the Holy One .*

*In this thing the Holy One pardon your servant:
 when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there,
 and he leans on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon,
 when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon,
 The Holy One pardon your servant in this thing.*

*He [Elisha] said to him “Go in shalom.” So he departed from him a little way.
 But Gehazi the servant of Elisha the man of God, said,
 “Behold, my master has spared this Na'aman the Arammian,
 in not receiving at his hands that which he brought:
 as the Holy One lives, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.
 So Gehazi followed after Na'aman.*

*When Na'aman saw one running after him,
 he alighted from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?
 He said, All is well. My master has sent me, saying,*

*Behold, even now there are come to me from the hill-country of Efrayim
two young men of the sons of the prophets;
please give them a talent of silver, and two changes of clothing.
Na`aman said, Be pleased to take two talents.
He urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing,
and laid them on two of his servants; and they bore them before him.
When he came to the hill, he took them from their hand,
and bestowed them in the house; and he let the men go, and they departed.
But he went in, and stood before his master.
Elisha said to him, “Whence come you, Gehazi?” He said, “Your servant went no where”.
He [Elisha] said to him, “Didn't my heart go with you,
when the man turned from his chariot to meet you?
Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments,
and olive groves and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and menservants and maidservants?
The tzara'at therefore of Na`aman shall cleave to you, and to your seed forever.”
He [Gehazi] went out from his presence a **metzora** - [as white] as snow.
[II Kings 5:15-27]*

[A] How would you describe what happened in Na'aman's *spirit* as a result of his healing?

[B] What do you think Yeshua was saying when he referred to Na'aman in Luke 4:27 [Read Luke 4:16-27 to put the reference in context].

[C] What did Na'aman want with “as much earth as two mules could carry”?

[D] What activities back home did Na'aman see as inconsistent with what he had experienced while in Israel?

[E] What parting blessing did Elisha give to Na'aman the Syrian?

[F] Continue reading in II Kings 5, verses 20-26. What sinful oath did Gehazi make?

[G] How do you think what happened with Gehazi relates to today's Torah parsha?

6. Our B'rit Chadasha reading for today is from Luke 12:22-31. Yeshua is speaking to His talmidim:

*Therefore I tell you, don't be anxious for your life,
what you will eat, nor yet for your body, what you will wear.
Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.
Consider the ravens: they don't sow, they don't reap,
they have no warehouse or barn, and God feeds them.
How much more valuable are you than birds!*

*Which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to his height?
If then you aren't able to do even the least things, why are you anxious about the rest?
Consider the lilies, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin;
yet I tell you, even Shlomo in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
But if this is how God clothes the grass in the field,
which today exists, and tomorrow is cast into the oven,*

*how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith?
Don't seek what you will eat or what you will drink; neither be anxious.
For the nations of the world seek after all of these things,
but your Father knows that you need these things.
But seek God's Kingdom, and all these things will be added to you.*

- [A] What is Yeshua teaching about in this passage?
[B] How did Gehazi “mess up”, according to Yeshua’s teaching of Torah?
[C] To what two created things does Yeshua refer in order to illustrate His point?

*May the marvelous love of the Holy One invade your life today,
and may your garments be made spotless, as white as fine linen.
And at the wedding banquet may you be granted a place very, very near the Master.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 119:97-104

*How love I your Torah! It is my meditation all day.
Your mitzvot make me wiser than my enemies,
for your mitzvot are always with me.*

*I have more understanding than all my teachers,
For your testimonies are my meditation.
I understand more than the aged, because I have kept your precepts.*

*I have kept my feet from every evil way,
that I might observe your word.
I have not turned aside from your ordinances,
for you have taught me.*

*How sweet are your promises to my taste, more than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts, I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.*