



Around the Shabbat Table

Shabbat Tazria/Metzorah / Yom Hazikaron-Yom Ha'azmaut 5762

April 2002

Editor's Note: We have the special privilege during this week of hearing from the BJE's Israel Shaliach (emissary), who wrote from Jerusalem, when he visited his home during Pesach.

This week's writer: Tuvia Book, Director of Israel and Zionist Education at the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, Shaliach for the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Introduction

This week, we read the *parashiot* of *Tazria / Metzora*, in the book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus). The majority of the Torah reading deals with the laws regarding ritual purity especially with regard to the ailment of *tzara'at* ("leprosy").

When one showed signs of this ailment on one's body, clothes or dwelling, one was examined by the *kohen* (priest). If the *kohen* was unable to give a definitive verdict, the person was isolated for seven days, then reexamined. If the blemish had spread, the person was declared a "*metzora*." S/he was then sent to live outside the camp until the illness subsided. Once the *kohen* had reexamined the person and confirmed the recovery, elaborate cleansing ceremonies over an eight-day period took place and the former *metzora* was then pronounced a full-fledged member of the community once again.

Many commentators have attempted to rationalize "Tzara'at" as a physically contagious disease. Others claim that the word *metzora* stands for two words: *motzeh ra* (one who brings forth evil through *Lashon Harah* –evil gossip). According to these commentators, the disease is more supernatural and sociological. One cannot be a full member of Jewish society as long as one is impure in tongue and deed. No-one is exempt from this law. Even Miriam, the sister of Moshe, was afflicted with this disease.

However, once one has repented s/he is allowed to return to the camp, as was the case with Miriam. The punishment for not being a positive member of Jewish society is isolation until one repents and realizes that: "All of Israel are brothers and sisters."

Special Dates this Week

During the coming week, communities throughout the world will observe *Yom Hazikaron* (Memorial Day for Israel's fallen soldiers) and *Yom Ha'azmaut* (Israel's 54th Independence Day)

Yom Hazikaron falls on Monday night, April 15 - Tuesday, April 16.

Yom Ha'azmaut falls on Tuesday night, April 16 – Wednesday, April 17 (5 Iyar, 5752). Now, more than any other in our recent history, we need to realize that all of Israel are brothers and sisters. We need to be proud of our heritage and our land and offer full support to our people. I'm writing these lines from Israel and would like to share some of my thoughts:

The level of pathological hatred of STRONG Jews endlessly astounds me. Jews are only acceptable as victims such as emaciated Holocaust survivors. But at no point are they allowed to be proud & vigorous. No other country in the world has the rest of the nations telling it how to defend itself.

We go out of our way to avoid civilian casualties in acts of self-defense. Palestinian Terrorists (not "gunmen" or "freedom fighters" as the *New York Times* frequently labels them) go out of their way to maximize civilian casualties. Our children are taught to live long & good lives & theirs are taught to live short & deadly lives.

Just like Nazi Germany had to be de-Nazified after WWII starting with the educational curriculum, so does the PA after this war. Their children have to be taught that this land is for sharing (not: "It's all our land & the Jews have no rights") & life is beautiful (not: "death is holy").

Today I saw a load of Israeli civilians who had baked cakes & cooked food come & give them to the soldiers defending our Homeland. It's at times like this we need to remember the Talmudic teaching:

"All of Israel is responsible for one another."

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

When your family sits down together this Shabbat, here are some questions for you to wrestle with:

1. Why was *Lashon Hara* such a tremendous transgression that total isolation from the camp of Israel was required?
2. Why did Rabbi Israel Meir HaCohen Kagan (often known as Chafetz Chaim) state that even speaking well about someone can lead to *Lashon Hara*?
3. Can you think of any ways to educate fellow Jews regarding the destructive nature of slander?

Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'azmaut give us the opportunity to join hands with our brothers and sisters in Israel. It is a time when we realize that Jews are no longer a people whose fate was decided by others, but a proud free strong nation once again in charge of our own destiny.

1. Do you know of any soldiers who died for our freedom in Israel? What were their stories?
2. Who were the *Chalutzim* (pioneers) and what was their role in founding Israel?
3. On Yom Haazmaut we celebrate the modern miracle of the establishment of the Jewish State. What do you do to celebrate? How can we show our support and solidarity in these important times?

Some texts to Wrestle With

Below is a poem written by Chana Szenesh (1921-1944) written in Yugoslavia in 1944 on a mission with Jews from Israel to save fellow Jews during the Holocaust. This poem is read all over Israel on Yom Hazikaron.

Blessed is the Match

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

Blessed is the flame that burns in the secret fastness of the heart.

Blessed is the heart with the strength to stop beating for honour's sake.

Blessed is the match consumed in the kindling flame.

This poem was written five years after Chana's *aliya* (move to Israel) as she reflected on her role as a Jewess while her people were being murdered in Europe. What is the "match" in the poem? Why is it "blessed?" What does Chana's poem reflect regarding the Jewish View of "Sanctity of Life?" When is it worth fighting for something? What would you fight for? How can we help Israel now in these trying times? Chana was a heroine. Are people born heroes? What characteristics do heroes possess?

[Note: Chana Szenesh was born in Hungary on July 17, 1921. despite a privileged and secular upbringing Chana became a Zionist and made *aliya* by herself in 1939 at the age of 18. Chana fell in love with the Land, language and people of Israel, and even become a founding member of a *kibbutz*.

In 1943 she volunteered to parachute behind enemy lines into Nazi occupied Europe. The major part of her mission was to try and warn the Jews of her native Hungary of the impending danger facing them. During the course of her operation she was caught & tortured by the Gestapo. The Nazis broke her body but not her spirit. Her remains were brought to Jerusalem in 1950]

On Israel's 54th celebration of independence we should reflect on what a 17-year-old Chana wrote in her diary. Less than a year after this entry she arrived on the shores of Israel.

"I don't know whether I've mentioned that I've become a Zionist. This word stands for a tremendous number of things. To me it means, in short, that I now consciously and strongly feel a Jew, and am proud of it..."

One needs something to believe in, something for which one has a whole – hearted enthusiasm. One needs to feel that one's life has meaning. That one is needed in this world. Zionism fulfills this for me."

(October 27, 1938)

Are you a Zionist? What does it mean to be a Zionist today? What do you do about it? Are you proud to be a Jew? How do you show your pride in our heritage and in our land? We need to remember that it is not a burden to be a Jew, it is a privilege.

In the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel:

"[In order to be a good Jew] it is not enough to know what's right but to **do** what is right."

Towards an Action Agenda

During the coming week, a major rally in support of Israel will be held in Washington, DC. Learn more about it (and better yet, send at least one family member:

<http://www.ujafedny.org/Events/isrsolrally.htm>

The Israel Consulate in New York sends a daily e-mail, with the latest news from Israel. You can subscribe to the free service by sending an e-mail message to:



listserv@pankow.inter.net.il

With one and only one line saying:
subscribe israeline first_name last_name

You can also check current events in Israel through the internet edition of the Jerusalem Post: www.jpost.com

Learn about how Israel is reported about in the media (and understand how the news we read and see often misrepresents the actual events, by learning about an organization called the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America: <http://world.std.com/~camera/>

Have your family send letters or e mails asking the president, senators and your congressperson to support Israel. You can learn more about doing this through our own Long Island Bi-County Political Action Committee:

<http://www.lijewishlinks.org/bicpac/about.html>

or the national American Israel Political Action Committee:

<http://www.aipac.org/ActionI.cfm>

Learn all about Israel with your family. There are all sorts of resources, including maps of Israel, historical information, and ideas for Israel activism and learning at the Jewish Agency for Israel: <http://www.jafi.org.il/>

There is another (and simple) way we can support Israel at its time of need. The Israeli economy has been seriously affected by terrorism and the ongoing conflict. Jobs have been lost, businesses have closed. We can support Israel's economy at \ by simply purchasing Israeli goods. In addition to what you can easily find in local stores (which normally stock Israeli wines, produce, and clothing), here are some web sites that contain a variety of Israeli products:

www.shopinisrael.com

www.balli.com/israsource/products.htm

www.israeliwishes.com

www.export.gov.il/export/doa_iis.dll/Serve/level/English/1.1.4.html

http://directory.google.com/Top/Regional/Middle_East/Israel/Business_and_Economy/Shopping/

www.israeliscent.com

www.israeldirect.co.il

<http://israelvisit.co.il/ShopIsrael/index.html>

Shabbat Shalom!

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

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