



Around the Shabbat Table

Shabbat Tazriah-Metzorah/ Yom Hazikaron- Yom Ha'azmaut 5764 April 2004

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 *parshiot* of *Tazria* and *Metzora*, in the book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus). These two *parshiot* concentrate on the laws of ritual purity. *Tazria* mentions "leprosy." But this was not a normal type of leprosy, not a natural phenomenon, but rather a miraculous ailment amongst the people of Israel that appeared not only on their skin, but also their clothes and even their houses. The purpose of this 'leprosy' was to warn them against the sin of *lashon hara* (evil gossip). Once the person had repented then the signs disappeared. No-one was too important to contract this disease. Even Miriam, the sister of Moses, was struck down when she spoke maliciously about her brother. The famous commentator *Rambam* (**Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon** 1135-1204) comments on Miriam's affliction:

"Despite the fact that Miriam was older than Moses and had nurtured him on her knees after having endangered her life to save him from the sea and, Moses did not mind her gossip, as it is written: "Moses was a very humble man" (Numbers 12:3) she was immediately punished with leprosy. How much more then is this applicable to evil people, those fools, who keep talking arrogantly and boastfully?"

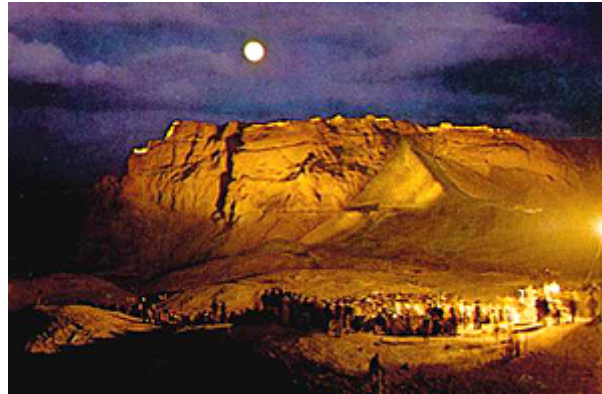
(Mishnah Torah)

Mezorah describes purification in the *mikveh* (ritual bath). The Torah requires a purifying bath to remove ritual uncleanness. The water of a *mikveh* has to come from a natural spring or a river; it must be running and not drawn. In modern cities where the water supply comes through underground pipes, many technicalities must be observed in the construction of a *mikveh*. The *mikveh* has played an important part in maintaining family purity (*taharat hamishpacha*) through the ages. In every Jewish community there has always been a *mikveh* conforming to the requirements of Jewish law and tradition. The Talmud suggests that a *mikveh* be the first communal institution built in a new settlement.

Even on top of Massada, surrounded by thousands of soldiers of the Roman Tenth Legion the besieged Jews built *mikvaot*. As Yigal Yadin, the excavator of Massada emotionally recalls in his book “Massada, Herod’s Last Fortress and the Zealots’ Last Stand”:

This *Mikveh* illustrates that the defenders of Massada were devout Jews, so that even here, on dry Massada, they had gone to the arduous lengths of building these ritual baths in scrupulous conformity with the injunctions of traditional Jewish law.

(Massada, p. 167)



[Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Hazikaron 2004/5764](#)

During the coming week, communities throughout the world will observe *Yom Hazikaron* (Memorial Day for Israel's fallen soldiers) and *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (Israel's 56th Independence Day)

Yom Hazikaron falls on Sunday night, April 24th - Monday, April 25th.

Yom Ha'atzmaut falls on Monday night, April 25th – Tuesday, April 26th (6 Iyar 5764).

It is during these times, more than any other in our recent history that we need to realize that all of Israel *are* brothers. We need to honour the young boys and girls of *Zahal* (Israel Defence Forces) who give the best years of their lives and put their very life on the line every day to ensure the safety and future of the Jewish homeland. We should be proud of our homeland and the wondrous achievements of Israel.

Ilan Ramon

If one person could sum up the achievements of Israel and illustrate just how far Israel has come that person could be Ilan Ramon (1954-2003).

- Ilan was born in the first decade of the State's existence. His mother and grandmother were both survivors of Auschwitz and arrived in Israel to rebuild their shattered lives.
- His father fought in the War of Independence to allow his family to live in peace and security in the new Jewish State.
- Ilan, during his service in the Israeli air force, when asked if he would take part in a mission to bomb Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981 responded: "If I can help prevent a second Holocaust, I'm prepared to sacrifice my life for this." Ilan not only successfully completed this mission, but also became the first Israeli in space. His mission was deeply symbolic.
- The son of a holocaust survivor and as a Colonel in the Israeli air force, he symbolizes just how far Israel has come in such a short space of time. A fitting eulogy for such a hero found in the words of Chana Szenesh:

*"There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth
though they have long been extinct.
There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world
though they are no longer among the living.
These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark.
They light the way for mankind."*

Ilan Ramon's mission symbolized that Israel can go anywhere. He reminded us that we have revived our language, made the desert bloom, rebuilt our homeland and are ingathering our exiles. In addition, we have the ability to defend our homeland and protect Jews worldwide and we continue to reach for the stars. In his address to Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon from the Shuttle Columbia in space, he said, "I think we have a great people in Israel, and we have to maintain our Jewish heritage. I think it's very important to preserve our historical and religious traditions." He added that his mission symbolized, "more than anything the ability of the Jewish people to survive anything, including horrible periods, and go from the darkest days to days of hope and faith in the future."



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 is *lashon hara* (evil gossip) such a heinous offence?
2. Why did a great Rabbi compare *lashon hara* to opening up a bag of feathers?
3. What can we learn by the fact that even Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Moses, contracted “leprosy?”
4. The *Mikveh* is a central institution in Jewish life. Why do think that this is the case?

Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut 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 the Ghetto Jews 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 stories of soldiers who died defending Israel's freedom?
2. Who were the *chalutzim* (pioneers), what was their role in founding Israel, and what can we learn from their example?
3. On Yom Ha'atzmaut 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?

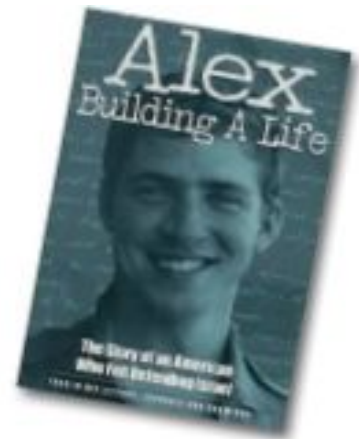
A Text to Wrestle With

Alexander Singer, 1962-1987

One September 15, 1987, a lieutenant in the Israel Defense Forces named Alexander Singer was killed in action while on patrol in Lebanon. Alex was buried in Mt. Herzl Military Cemetery.

Alex, a platoon commander who made Aliya in 1984, was killed while trying to reach his commander whom he believed was wounded in a terrorist ambush. In fact, his commander had died instantly. When Alex, under fire, reached his commander, he too was attacked and killed – on his 25th birthday. Another soldier, who then tried to reach the two of them, was also killed.

Alex, a *summa cum laude* graduate of Cornell University, was a writer, an artist, a lover of Zion, a yearner for peace and an observant Jew. He died while doing what he very much wanted to be doing. Among his journals the following poem was found:



*“Once in a while
As I progress towards the course’s end
I feel a pang of fear.*

*If the war comes,
When the war comes
I will have to lead men to die.*

*But those men were not men a short time ago.
Some don’t even shave yet.
And I will have to have the calm power
To yell to them
Or to whisper*

Kadima (Forward)

*And,
I will have to have the calm power
To step forward myself.”*

Questions For your family:

- 1) What were your thoughts after having read about Alex?
- 2) What meaning do you think the last stanza of the poem holds for us?
- 3) In your opinion, did the life that Alex led personify the statement by Gandhi:
“We must become the change we wish to see?”

(The information on Ilan Ramon and Alex Singer comes from: **“For the Sake of Zion: Pride and Strength through Knowledge, an Educator’s Guide”** (BJENY/JAFI 2004) written by Tuvia Book. This book is available online at: www.bjeny.org or by calling the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York on 646 473 5300)

Towards an Action Agenda

1. The letters, drawing and drawing of Alex Singer are thoughtful, insightful and inspirational. You can learn more about Alex on: www.alexingerproject.org or purchase his book online or in a Jewish book shop: Alex: Building a Life – the Story of an American Who Fell Defending Israel (Geffen: New York/Jerusalem, 1996)
2. You can find background information as well as prayers and observances for Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut through the website of the Jewish Agency for Israel at: <http://www.jajz-ed.org.il/festivals/ZKATZ/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

Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan, project coordinator at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

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