

CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

In Vayikra 14:34 we read: "When you come to the Land of Canaan that I am giving you as an inheritance, and I will place a lesion of Tzara'at (affliction) on the house, in the Land of your inheritance".

Rashi, following the words of the Talmud (Horayot 11a) says that these are good tidings since the homeowner of a house afflicted with Tzara'at, could expect to find - while dismantling the walls of his home - gold which had been hidden in the walls by the original Canaanite owners. The Torah Temima explains that the source of this surprising contention is to be found in the Torah's usage of the phrase 'Venatati Nega Tzara'at', (literally I will grant or give), which regularly indicates a gift or a benefit received. This helps us understand how the rabbis derived their Peirush from the words of the verse, but it doesn't answer the additional question of why the plague of Tzara'at meted out as a punishment for slanderous speech should result in such a rewarding outcome. After all, if the affliction is seen as a form of Divine punishment, then why should it have such should have a silver, (or rather, a gold lining...) attached to it?

I should like to concentrate on the explanation of the Kli Yakar who suggested that Tzara'at should be seen not so much a punishment as much as a wake-up call directed towards the

unrepentant slanderer. If the call is promptly heeded one can even expect to be rewarded.

[The Kli Yakar, Rabbi Ephraim Ben Aaron (b. 1550), served as the Rabbi of the city of Lvov, and later as the Chief Rabbi of Prague . When he was In his early fifties he fell deathly ill (as a result, the name Shlomo was added to his given name and he became Shlomo Ephraim) and vowed to compose a commentary to the Torah were he to regain his health. Approximately a year later he completed his commentary which became an instant classic.]

The Kli Yakar states that, in essence, the Tzara'at served as an early warning system. Thinking in relation to modern-day concepts, the Tzara'at could be viewed, in a certain sense, as a spiritual version, or parallel, to the NORAD (the North American Air Defense Command) early-warning system created in the fifties to warn of incoming missiles launched from Russia, or more recently the Israeli manufactured Iron-Dome system deployed near the Azza border. Before the devastating missile could land wreaking havoc, the early warning provided one with the ability to make last minute adjustments to lessen any harm. Here too, when a house was hit by Tzara'at, this served as a warning to its owner, that evil was to be found within it's confines. Metzora - Motzi-Ra. The Tzara'at revealed the problematic situation which could not be allowed to go on any longer: Rather than inviting and welcoming guests into the home, Bnei Habayit, the



household had behaved in a stingy manner (Tzarut Ayin), regarding their home as a private castle into which any "outsiders" were not granted entry. As a result of such conduct, the Almighty has decided to take them to task. The home was struck by a plague, as a first warning signal. If the initial warning did not lead to a change in the way things were being done, then the affliction would be intensified and would progress onward to the next level. If at first it was the walls of the home that had been affected, the next stage would bring the affliction closer to heart as a person's clothes would now show signs of Tzara'at Habeged. If this additional warning turned out to be insufficient, the next stage of the process would be to proceed to an even more intimately experienced signal, as the Tzara'at lesions took hold upon one's body. This is one of the reasons the Rambam tells us (Peirush Hamishnayot Negaim 12:5) that these various forms of Tzara'at were not natural physical illnesses but rather miraculous events.

This notion of a Divine signalling system which utilizes affliction with the intention that the events wake us from our spiritual slumber and galvanize us to take action is highly instructive in attempting to make sense of our national history over the past generation.

The Hibbat Zion Movement - an important forerunner of the Zionist Organization - which was aimed at promoting the return of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael, was established

in Russia following the pogroms of 1881-1882. The great suffering and affliction experienced during those years served as the impetus for this movement, which began the process of shifting our national consciousness back towards our ancestral homeland. [This idea in no way exonerates our enemies for their malicious behavior, and yet, nonetheless, a basic Jewish belief is that we view every event as a vehicle for our own self improvement.]

Seeking to encourage Jews to settle in Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Shmuel Mohiliver, and others, influenced Baron Edmond de Rothschild to purchase land for Jewish colonization, and encouraged courageous families to take the plunge and give it a try .

Rabbi Mohilever's message for the Jews of his time was: "Why do you remain aloof while our Land is being built? Come redeem the soil and build structures to reach up to the Heavens". Although a significant number of people heeded the initial call, the multitudes stayed away. The mass emigrations only occurred when many others were awoken as the signalling hit more strident and horrific notes...

More than 125 years later Rabbi Mohilever's words continue to resound in our ears - let us not stay away any longer.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness, Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh

