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DAF KESHER

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This Daf Kesher is dedicated to the sacred memory of all our brothers and sisters who perished in the Holocaust, די"ד.

DVAR TORAH ON THE HAFTARAH "TOMORROW IS ROSH CHODESH"

This week's Haftarah is known as "Machar Chodesh – Tomorrow Is Rosh Chodesh." It gets its name from two words that appear in the first verse of the Haftarah (I Shmuel 20:18-42), and is read when Shabbat falls on the day preceding Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of the month. The Haftarah focuses on one episode, that took place surrounding Rosh Chodesh, when, through the help of King Shaul's son Yonatan, King David avoided being attacked by King Shaul.

The choice of Haftarat is puzzling. Is it possible that the mere mention of "tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh" would be a sufficient reason to justify veering from the normal cycle of Haftarat, whose theme is usually connected to the weekly Torah portion or the holidays? And to answer that the passage was chosen only to encourage people to have a seudat Rosh Chodesh, a special feast in honor of Rosh Chodesh, like King Shaul did (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 419) is also not compelling. The main theme of the Haftarah seems to be the interaction between Yonatan, David, and Shaul – how Yonatan and David's intense friendship prevailed despite Shaul's pursuit of David, whereas the Rosh Chodesh feast seems to merely be the setting of the Haftarah, not its focus. Why, then, does the Haftarah of "Machar Chodesh" take precedence over that of Shemini or Tazria-Metzora?

In *בין הפטרה לפרשה*, a collection of essays on the Haftarat, Harav Yehudah Shaviv (of Yeshivat Har Etzion in Alon Shevut), suggests that a Midrashic theme connects Rosh Chodesh – and even the day preceding it – with the main theme of our Haftarah and its hero, Yonatan the son of King Shaul.

Chazal noted the discrepancy between two ways the sun and moon are referred to in the same verse of Creation story: *וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹקִים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַמָּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים אֶת הַמָּאֹר הַגָּדֹל לְמַשְׁלַת הַיּוֹם וְאֶת הַמָּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמַשְׁלַת הַלַּיְלָה וְאֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים* – G-d made the two great luminaries, the great luminary to control the day and the small luminary to control the night, and the stars" (Bereishit 1:15). Why are the sun and moon first referred to as both great, then as great and small? Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi (Chulin 60b) answers: "The moon said before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'How can two kings wear the same crown?' He said to the moon, 'Go and diminish yourself'."

David's success in the war against the Phillistines was seen by Shaul as a threat to his rule (I Shmuel 18:8-9), and fueled his aggressive pursuit of David. But Yonatan, Shaul's own son, took the opposite path. He realized that Hashem had chosen David over Shaul and therefore negated himself to David and forfeited royalty.

It is precisely on Rosh Chodesh, when the new moon appears, that Yonatan tested Shaul's reaction to David's absence at the royal seudat Rosh Chodesh (I Shmuel 20:18-34). Will Shaul "minimize himself" like Hashem instructed the moon, or would he still persist with his pursuit of David because "two kings cannot share one crown"? While Shaul's animosity towards David remained, Yonatan only intensified his love for David through the vow that ends our Haftarah: "Hashem will be between us and between our descendants forever" (I Shmuel 20:42). And it is precisely on the day **preceding** Rosh Chodesh, when the moon is totally invisible, that Yonatan's love and heroic negation to David shined like the moon, the night's "small luminary." Rav Shaviv concludes with a prayer that Yonatan-like humility among our People will cause the moon's light to renew as the sun's.

Our Parshah describes tzara'at habayit, the supernatural plague that afflicted a house, and the detailed procedure a home-owner and Kohen would go through following its appearance. One detail is puzzling: the home owner could not state categorically 'Nega – A plague has appeared to me in the house,' but rather "K'nega (adding a Kaf, meaning "something like") – "Something like a plague has appeared to me in the house." In this source guide Rabbi Fischer explores one letter of one word of our Parshah in depth, offering five explanations for the additional "Kaf."

1. Background

The first signs of tzaraat (a disease often translated as leprosy) must be examined carefully. Tzara'at is the collective name for afflictions that attack the body, clothing or house; the usual translation of "leprosy" is inaccurate. Tzara'at is a source of tum'ah (a hard word to translate as well; the best we might say is "spiritual defilement" determined by physical conditions), and requires purification (taharah).

The rabbis teach that Hashem cursed tzara'at on one whose character is flawed by, for example, speaking ill of others or selfishness (Arachin 15-16). At first his house is affected, then his clothing, and only after these manifestations is his body afflicted. Tzara'at is a "good pain," punishing him at a stage when these faults can still be rectified.

2. House-Tzaraat

First comes house-tzaraat:

<p>1. Vayikra 14:34-36 (34) When you will come to the land of Canaan which I give to you for a possession, and I will put the plague of tzara'at in a house of the land of your possession. (35) And he to whom the house belongs shall come and tell the priest, saying: 'Something like a plague has appeared to me in the house.' (36) Then the priest shall command that they empty the house, before the priest comes to view the plague, so that all that is in the house be not made tamei (spiritually defiled); then afterwards the priest shall come to view the house.</p>	<p>ויקרא יד:לד-לו (לד) כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְכֶם לְאֶחְזָה וְנִתְחִי נֹגַע צֹרַעַת בְּבַיִת אֶרֶץ אֶחְזָתְכֶם. (לה) וּבָא אִשָּׁר לוֹ הַבַּיִת וְהִגִּיד לַפֶּהֱן לֵאמֹר כְּנֹגַע נִרְאָה לִי בַּבַּיִת. (לו) וְצִוָּה הַפֶּהֱן וּפְנֹו אֶת הַבַּיִת בְּטָרָם יָבֹא הַפֶּהֱן לִרְאוֹת אֶת הַנֹּגַע וְלֹא יִטְמָא כָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת וְאַחֲרַי כֵּן יָבֹא הַפֶּהֱן לִרְאוֹת אֶת הַבַּיִת.</p>
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Rashi refers to the Mishnah that focuses on the extra כ of כנגע (Nega'im 12:5):

<p>2. Rashi on Vayikra 14:34-36 Even if the owner of the house who notices the signs is a scholar, and is able to determine with certainty that this is tzara'at, he may not state categorically "נגע" – "A plague has appeared to me in the house," but rather "כנגע" – "Something like a plague has appeared to me in the house."</p>	<p>רש"י על ויקרא יד:לה אפי' תלמיד חכם שיוודע שהוא נגע ודאי לא יפסוק דבר ברור לומר "נגע נראה לי" אלא "כנגע נראה לי."</p>
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The Rambam codifies this halachah in the Laws of the Uncleaness of Tzara'at (14:4).

3. Why Say "Something Like a Plague"?

Why dilute the truth? As the Siftei Chachamim (Harav Shabbetai Bass, זצ"ל 1641-1718) points out, at first the Torah says, "and I will put the plague of tzara'at," which indicates certainty. So, why should the Torah now insist on the words of uncertainty, "Something like a plague?"

Furthermore, even if the owner of the house were to make a definitive statement, it would have no effect, because, as the Mishnah teaches (Nega'im 3:1), "Uncleaness and cleanness are in the power of the Kohen (priest):" the Kohen tells him whether to declare "tamei," and only then does the house become tamei. The Kohen's proclamation is intrinsic to the creation of reality. All the owner does is to provide the basis for creating

that reality.

This leads to the question asked by Harav Eliahu Mizrachi, ל"ה (Turkey, 1450-1525): Why must the owner say "k'nega?" After all, prior to the Kohen's proclamation there is no tum'ah. So, what harm would there be in the owner saying "nega?" Whatever he says will not change the situation anyway!

4. Five Explanations

A comprehensive summary of the major points of view in this question is presented by Harav Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, ל"ה (1579-1654, a disciple of the Maharal who served as a rav in Prague and Krakow) in his commentary Tosefot Yom Tov on the Mishnah. He discusses five opinions:

A. R. Mizrachi quotes his teachers: The Torah is teaching a lesson in proper behavior (derech erez), to speak with reservation and humility, even when the situation looks unequivocally clear. As the Talmud says, "Teach your tongue to say 'I do not know'" (Tractate Berachot 4a).

B. R. Mizrachi himself suggests two answers. First: Since the Kohen is the only one to determine whether or not the house is unclean, for anyone else to say so would be disrespectful towards the position of the Kohen. This is similar to the prohibition against a student, even a very knowledgeable one, rendering a halachic decision in the presence of his teacher (Tractate Sanhedrin 5b).

C. R. Mizrachi's second answer is that the Kohen should not be rushed into making his proclamation. By the owner saying "k'nega," he is taking some of the pressure off the Kohen.

D. The author of Gur Aryeh (Harav Yehudah Loewe ben Betzalel, ל"ה the Maharal of Prague, c. 1525-1609) states: The owner may not say, "A plague," simply because it is not true. Until the Kohen proclaims it tamei, it is not a plague, and must not be spoken of as such, because "He that tells lies shall not remain" (Psalms 101:7).

E. The author of Korban Aharon (Harav Aharon ben Avraham ibn Chayim, ל"ה, 1545-1632) comments: When the symptoms of tzara'at appear in the house, it is a plague, but it does not attain the status of tamei until the Kohen declares it so. Meanwhile, however, it is still possible that the plague will dim and the Kohen will then proclaim tahor. At this stage, the owner is enjoined, "Do not open your mouth to the Satan" (Tractate Berachot 19a): do not foreshadow a worst-case scenario.

5. Another Question

One question remains: Why doesn't this insistence on saying k'nega also apply to body-tzara'at or clothing-tzara'at? The author of the Tosefot Yom Tov notes that house-tzara'at is the first stage in the process. Once the clothing or body has been afflicted, the die has been cast and it's too late.

Perhaps here we can incorporate the idea from the Korban Aharon. At this unresolved stage between k'nega and nega, all is not lost. In fact, Hashem is doing the owner of the house a favor by making him aware of a fault in his character. This seeming-plague is an alarm bell, a wake-up call to repentance. Now is not the time to take a negative attitude, but to welcome the warning before matters deteriorate.

6. Seven Lessons

From this one halacha (law), we gain many insights into the values that must suffuse Torah learning:

- Pursue truth with humility.
- Respect those in positions of honor.
- Make decisions without haste.
- Be accurate.
- Remain open to positive results.
- Be ready for initiatives to self-improvement.
- Be careful with each word.

All this from "k'nega!" How much can be learned from just one letter!

DVAR TORAH ON THE PARSHAH THE TREASURE IN THE IMPURE WALL

The Torah's opens its passage about צרעת הבית (plague on houses) in a surprisingly positive tone: "When you come to the Land of Canaan that I am giving to you as a possession, I will place the tzara'at plague on the house of the Land of your possession" (Vayikra 14:34). Rashi (based on Torat Kohanim 14:75) writes: "This is good news for them, for the Emorites had hidden gold treasures in the walls of their houses during the entire forty years that the Jews were in the desert, and through the plague the wall is broken and it is found."

The Piasetzna Rebbe (Harav Kalonymos Kalman Shapira, דצ"ל הי"ד, 1889-1943, murdered in the Holocaust), in Aish Kodesh (essays he wrote during the years 1939-1942 whose manuscripts were buried in milk cans under a building in the Warsaw Ghetto, and were providentially unearthed and published after the war) asks an obvious question (Parshat Metzora 5740, pp. 40-41): If Hashem wanted to give the Jew a present of hidden Emorite gold treasure, why did his house have to be rendered impure for seven days? This is especially difficult according to the Ramban and others who say that these tzara'at plagues were supernatural. When they identified the plague on the house why didn't they just break open the wall and give its owner the gold?

Even though, as he says, we cannot know the true intent of the Torah's laws, which are given by an infinitely wise G-d, we can still learn a lesson from the impurity that goes along with the tzara'at of houses. The dissonance that goes along with tzara'at on houses – G-d gives a present of gold preceded by seven days of impurity – has its parallel in our life experiences.

When a person, G-d forbid, experiences physical suffering, he is challenged to believe that it is ultimately Divine good. But it is a more powerful challenge to experience spiritual suffering and believe that it comes from Divine goodness and not Divine distancing.


Impurity seems to distance a person from Divine service. He cannot enter the Beit Hamikdash or eat sacrifices. Are the seven days of impurity a message from Hashem that He is distancing this home owner?

The Piasetzna Rebbe asked this question in 1939, after the Nazis, ימה שמם, had closed all houses of worship and learning in Poland: "When we see now that He is not only smiting us with sufferings of the body but even through things that seem to distance us from Him – there is no cheder for children to learn Torah in and no yeshiva, no beit midrash to learn in and no mikvah and the like – then, G-d forbid, a doubt might arouse within us: Is His intent also now for our good? For if it was for the good he should have chastised us through things that bring us closer to Him, not through stopping Torah learning and tefillah and, G-d forbid, almost all of the Torah. Are these not the sufferings of 'He cast them away ...' (Devarim 29:27)?"

Therefore the Torah counters, in the passage of house-tzara'at, that this is not the case. Even through seven days of seemingly distancing impurity Hashem brings the Israelite a present of a treasure.

This, he suggests, is why the one who sees a plague on his house does not say, "Nega – A plague appeared to me," but rather "K'nega – Something like a plague has appeared to me in the house." It only appears as a plague but it is really a gift.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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The following digital Torah resources have been extremely helpful in researching and preparing the Shapell's Daf Keshet:
DBS – Hataklitor Hatorani, Otzar Hachochmah, the Bar Ilan Responsa Project, Hebrewbooks.org, and the Tanach section of Chabad.org.

We continue to pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.