

Service times

Friday 7 PM

Shabbos 9:30-11:30 am

INSPIRE

TAZRIA MEZORAH
5TH IYAR - 17 APRIL 2021



CLOUDS, CURSES AND CONCEALED COMPASSION

By Yossi Goldman

Does every cloud really have a silver lining? Is there a blessing in disguise inside every curse? Well, admittedly, it isn't always so easy to discern, but we most certainly do believe in the concept.

This week's Torah reading deals with the purification of those afflicted by the strange leprosy-like malady known as tzara'as (a word uncannily similar to tzores!). The Parshah recounts different types of tzara'as manifestations—on a person's body, in his clothes or even in the walls of his house. In the latter case, if after the necessary quarantine period the stain had still not receded, the stones of the affected wall would have to be removed and replaced with new ones.

Now imagine the walls of your house being demolished. Is that a blessing or a curse? No doubt, the homeowner in question would not feel himself particularly blessed. But, according to our sages, the case was often different for the Israelites living in the Holy Land. The previous Canaanite inhabitants of the land would bury their treasures inside the very walls of their homes. The only way an Israelite would ever discover those hidden valuables was if the stones of the house would be removed. When this happened, it didn't take long for the poor unfortunate tzara'as-afflicted homeowner to be transformed into the wealthy heir of a newfound fortune. Suddenly his dark cloud was filled with linings of silver, gold and all kinds of precious objects. For him, in a moment, the curse became blessing.

Some time ago, a friend's business went into liquidation. Naturally, he was absolutely devastated. After a while he opened a new business which, thank G-d, prospered. He later confessed to me that in retrospect he was able to see how the earlier bankruptcy was truly a blessing. I still remember his words: "Before we were working for the banks; now we are working for our families."

A woman in my congregation was suffering from heart disease, and the doctors said she needed bypass surgery. But she also had other medical complications which made a heart operation too dangerous to contemplate. Her quality of life was very poor. If she went for a walk, she would have to stop and rest every few minutes. Then, one day, she suffered a heart attack. She was rushed to the hospital and the doctors said her only chance of survival was an emergency bypass operation. There was a 50/50 chance of success, but if they didn't do it she had no chance at all. They performed the surgery and, thank G-d, she made a full recovery, enjoying many years of greatly improved quality of life with nachas from children and grandchildren.

For years she would joke, "Thank G-d I had a heart attack. I got my bypass!" It was no joke.

It would be naïve to suggest that it always works out this way. Life isn't so simple, and sometimes it takes much longer to see the good that is hidden in the traumas and difficulties of life. But we will continue to believe that G-d is good, that He really does want the best for us, and that one day, with hindsight, we will see how each of our frustrations did somehow serve us well in the long term.

All of us will at one time or another experience disappointments in life. The challenge is to learn from those disappointments and grow from them. Who knows if the wiser, more sensitive person we become is not the silver lining itself?

In general, there are two qualities which form a powerful combination to help us appreciate that there is a hidden goodness inside every misfortune: faith and patience. With faith that there is a higher, better purpose to life, and with patience to bide our time for its revelation, we will be able to persevere and weather the crises of life.

Please G-d, may we all find our silver linings soon.

THE EIGHTH DAY

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Shabbat Times
Candle Lighting 7:41pm
Shabbos ends 8:59pm

Our Parshah begins with childbirth and, in the case of a male child, “on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.” This became known not just as milah, “circumcision,” but something altogether more theological, brit milah, “the covenant of circumcision.” That is because even before Sinai, almost at the dawn of Jewish history, circumcision became the sign of G-d’s covenant with Abraham.

Why circumcision? Why was this from the outset not just a mitzvah, one command among others, but the very sign of our covenant with G-d and His with us? And why on the eighth day? Last week’s Parshah was called Shemini, “the eighth [day],” because it dealt with the inauguration of the Mishkan, the Sanctuary, which also took place on the eighth day. Is there a connection between these two quite different events?

The place to begin is a strange midrash recording an encounter between the Roman governor Tyrannus Rufus and Rabbi Akiva. Rufus began the conversation by asking, “Whose works are better, those of G-d or of man?” Surprisingly, the rabbi replied, “Those of man.” Rufus responded, “But look at the heavens and the earth. Can a human being make anything like that?” Rabbi Akiva replied that the comparison was unfair. “Creating heaven and earth is clearly beyond human capacity. Give me an example drawn from matters that are within human scope.” Rufus then said, “Why do you practice circumcision?” To this Rabbi Akiva replied, “I knew you would ask that question. That is why I said in advance that the works of man are better than those of G-d.”

The rabbi then set before the governor ears of grain and cakes. The unprocessed grain is the work of G-d. The cake is the work of man. Is it not more pleasant to eat cake than raw ears of grain? Rufus then said, “If G-d really wants us to practise circumcision, why did He not arrange for babies to be born circumcised?” Rabbi Akiva replied, “G-d gave the commandments to Israel to refine our character.” This is a very odd conversation, but, as we will see, a deeply significant one. To understand it, we have to go back to the beginning of time.

The Torah tells us that for six days G-d created the universe and on the seventh He rested, declaring it holy. His last creation, on the sixth day, was humanity: the first man and the first woman. According to the sages, Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit already on that day, and were sentenced to exile from the Garden of Eden. However, G-d delayed the execution of sentence for a day, to allow them to spend Shabbat in the garden. As the day came to a close, the humans were about to be sent out into the world in the darkness of night. G-d took pity on them and showed them how to make light. That is why we light a special candle at havdalah, not just to mark the end of Shabbat but also to show that we begin the workday week with the light G-d taught us to make.

The havdalah candle therefore represents the light of the eighth day—which marks the beginning of human creativity. Just as G-d began the first day of creation with the words “Let there be light,” so at the start of the eighth day He showed humans how they too could make light. Human creativity is thus conceived in Judaism as parallel to Divine creativity, and its symbol is the eighth day.

That is why the Mishkan was inaugurated on the eighth day. As Nechama Leibowitz and others have noted, there is an unmistakable parallelism between the language the Torah uses to describe G-d’s creation of the universe and the Israelites’ creation of the Sanctuary. The Mishkan was a microcosm—a cosmos in miniature. Thus Genesis begins and Exodus ends with stories of creation, the first by G-d, the second by the Israelites. The eighth day is when we celebrate the human contribution to creation.

That is also why circumcision takes place on the eighth day. All life, we believe, comes from G-d. Every human being bears His image and likeness. We see each child as G-d’s gift: “Children are the provision of the L-rd; the fruit of the womb, His reward.” Yet it takes a human act—circumcision—to signal that a male Jewish child has entered the covenant. That is why it takes place on the eighth day, to emphasize that the act that symbolizes entry into the covenant is a human one—just as it was when the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai said, “All that the L-rd has said, we will do and obey.”

Mutuality and reciprocity mark the special nature of the specific covenant G-d made, first with Abraham, then with Moses and the Israelites. It is this that differentiates it from the universal covenant G-d made with Noah and through him with all humanity. That covenant, set out in Genesis 9, involved no human response. Its content was the seven Noahide commands. Its sign was the rainbow. But G-d asked nothing of Noah, not even his consent. Judaism embodies a unique duality of the universal and the particular. We are all in covenant with G-d by the mere fact of our humanity. We are bound, all of us, by the basic laws of morality. This is part of what it means to be human.

But to be Jewish is also to be part of a particular covenant of reciprocity with G-d. G-d calls. We respond. G-d begins the work and calls on us to complete it. That is what the act of circumcision represents. G-d did not cause male children to be born circumcised, said Rabbi Akiva, because He deliberately left this act, this sign of the covenant, to us.

Now we begin to understand the full depth of the conversation between Rabbi Akiva and the Roman governor Tineius Rufus. For the Romans, the Greeks and the ancient world generally, the gods were to be found in nature: the sun, the sea, the sky, the earth and its seasons, the fields and their fertility. In Judaism, G-d is beyond nature, and His covenant with us takes us beyond nature also. So for us, not everything natural is good. War is natural. Conflict is natural. The violent competition to be the alpha male is natural. Jews—and others inspired by the G-d of Abraham—believe, as Katharine Hepburn said to Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*, that “Nature, Mr Allnut, is what we are put in this world to rise above.”

The Romans found circumcision strange because it was unnatural. Why not celebrate the human body as G-d made it? G-d, said Rabbi Akiva to the Roman governor, values culture, not just nature; the work of humans, not just the work of G-d. It was this cluster of ideas—that G-d left creation unfinished so that we could become partners in its completion; that by responding to G-d’s commands we become refined; that G-d delights in our creativity, and helped us along the way by teaching the first humans how to make light—that made Judaism unique in its faith in G-d’s faith in humankind. All of this is implicit in the idea of the eighth day as the day on which G-d sent humans out into the world to become His partners in the work of creation.

Why is this symbolized in the act of circumcision? Because if Darwin was right, then the most primal of all human instincts is to seek to pass on one’s genes to the next generation. That is the strongest force of nature within us. Circumcision symbolizes the idea that there is something higher than nature. Passing on our genes to the next generation should not simply be a blind instinct, a Darwinian drive. The Abrahamic covenant was based on sexual fidelity, the sanctity of marriage, and the consecration of the love that brings new life into the world.⁹ It is a rejection of the ethic of the alpha male.

G-d created physical nature: the nature charted by science. But He asks us to be co-creators, with Him, of human nature. As R. Avraham Mordechai Alter of Ger said. “When G-d said, ‘Let us make man in our image,’ to whom was He speaking? To man himself. G-d said to man, Let us—you and I—make man together.”¹⁰ The symbol of that co-creation is the eighth day, the day He helps us begin to create a world of light and love.

PARSHA SUMMARY

ARTSCROLL 608-1172
LIVING TORAH 556 -1160

HAFTORAH SUMMARY

The Parshahs of Tazria and Metzora continue the discussion of the laws of tumah v'taharah, ritual impurity and purity.

A woman giving birth should undergo a process of purification, which includes immersing in a mikvah (a naturally gathered pool of water) and bringing offerings to the Holy Temple. All male infants are to be circumcised on the eighth day of life.

Tzaraat (often mistranslated as "leprosy") is a supra-natural plague, which can afflict people as well as garments or homes. If white or pink patches appear on a person's skin (dark pink or dark green in garments or homes), a kohen is summoned. Judging by various signs, such as an increase in size of the afflicted area after a seven-day quarantine, the kohen pronounces it tamei (impure) or tahor (pure).

A person afflicted with tzaraat must dwell alone outside of the camp (or city) until he is healed. The afflicted area in a garment or home must be removed; if the tzaraat recurs, the entire garment or home must be destroyed.

When the metzora ("leper") heals, he or she is purified by the kohen with a special procedure involving two birds, spring water in an earthen vessel, a piece of cedar wood, a scarlet thread and a bundle of hyssop. Ritual impurity is also engendered through a seminal or other discharge in a man, and menstruation or other discharge of blood in a woman, necessitating purification through immersion in a mikvah.

This week's haftorah discusses the story of four men stricken by tzara'at, a skin ailment caused by sins – one of the main topics of this week's Torah reading.

Haftorah's backdrop: King Ben-Hadad of Aram besieged Samaria (the Northern Kingdom of Israel). The resulting famine was catastrophic, reducing many to cannibalism. King Jehoram of Israel wanted to execute the prophet Elisha, considering that his prayers could have prevented the entire tragedy. Elisha reassured the king: "So has G-d said, 'At this time tomorrow, a seah of fine flour will sell for [merely] a shekel, and two seahs of barley will sell for a shekel in the gate of Samaria.'" One of the king's officers present scoffed at the prophecy: "Behold, if G-d makes windows in the sky, will this thing come about?" Elisha responded, "Behold, you will see with your own eyes, but you shall not eat there from."

Now, four men suffering from tzara'at dwelled in quarantine outside the city. They too were hungry, victims of the famine. They decided to approach the enemy camp to beg for food. They arrived only to find a deserted camp. For "G-d had caused the Aramean camp to hear the sound of chariots and the sound of horses, the sound of a great army. And they said to one another, 'Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us.'" The entire enemy army fled, leaving behind their tents, horses, donkeys and provisions.

The four men went to the city and reported their findings to the gatekeepers who, in turn, informed King Jehoram. Though originally thinking that this was an ambush planned by the enemy, the king sent messengers who confirmed the miracle. The people swarmed out of the city and looted the enemy camp, thus breaking the famine and fulfilling Elisha's prophecy. And the officer? The king placed him in charge of the city gates. He was trampled to death by the rampaging crowds – after seeing the fulfillment of the prophet's words...

WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

Clein, Wendy father Goldberg, Solomon Shlomo Herschel ben Isreal Monday 19/4/21 Iyar 7, 5781

Clein, Trevor father Clein, David Dovid Yosef ben Tuesday 20/4/21 Iyar 8, 5781

Fagelson, Ian father Fagelson, David Yaakov David Yaakov ben Yitzchak Tuesday 20/4/21 Iyar 8, 5781

Glassar, Harry father Glassar, Yisrael Yisrael ben Shloima David Tuesday 20/4/21 Iyar 8, 5781

Perry, Stanley mother Plotzky, Rebecca Leah Beila bas Shabtai Tuesday 20/4/21 Iyar 8, 5781

Davis, Richard brother Davis, Peter Pinchus ben Binyamin Wednesday 21/4/21 Iyar 9, 5781

JEWISH HUMOUR

A congregant asks his rabbi, "Rabbi, you're a man of God. So why is it that you are always talking about business, when I, a businessman, am always talking about spiritual matters?"
"You have discovered one of the principles of human nature," the rabbi replies.

"And what's that Rabbi?"

"People like to discuss things they know nothing about."

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

It can't be seen, can't be felt, can't be heard, and can't be smelt. It lies behind stars and under hills, And empty holes it fills. It comes first and follows after, Ends life, and kills laughter. What is it?

last weeks answer

Three playing cards in a row. Can you name them with these clues? There is a two to the right of a king. A diamond will be found to the left of a spade. An ace is to the left of a heart. A heart is to the left of a spade. Now, identify all three cards.

1. King of Hearts
2. Two of Spades
3. Ace of Diamonds

STORY TIME

The energetic tune of Hava Nagila has its origins in the early 1800s in Czarist Russia. At the time, Czar Nicholas I enacted a number of cruel decrees against the Jewish population. Most devastating of all was the law that young Jewish boys be forcibly taken from their homes and serve in the Czar's army for 25 years. Given such privations, many Jews tried to resist, sometimes by defying the Czar publicly, and more often in private, by maintaining their Jewish practice and spirituality at home.

One Jewish leader who gained a reputation as opposing the Czar was Rabbi Yisroel Friedman, who was born in 1797 in the town of Ruzhin, in the Ukraine. So great was his charisma that Rabbi Friedman soon became a local Jewish leader; his followers were known as "Ruzhin" Chassidim. Like many Chassidic rebbes, Rabbi Friedman acknowledged the difficulties in life and encouraged his fellow Jews to try and live lives of happiness and joy, even in the face of brutal repression. Singing is one way of creating happiness and many Chassidic communities became known for humming wordless tunes called nigunim. These catchy tunes were popular during holiday and Shabbat meals, and helped create a rousing, fun atmosphere.

At the age of 41, Rabbi Friedman was accused of being a "rebel" against the Czar and was cast into prison for two long years. In 1840, he managed to escape and fled to the town of Sadigora in Austria, where he found refuge and was welcomed by the local Jewish community, eventually building up another group of followers.

These Chassidim were sometimes known as Sadigora Chassidim; like their counterparts in Ukraine, they engaged in happy song when together. One of these tunes was Hava Nagila, though it wasn't yet known by that name.

Around the turn of the 20th century, a group of Sadigora Chassidim moved from Austria to Jerusalem, bringing their unique tunes and nigunim with them. There, around the year 1915, some of the Chassidim met with a musical pioneer, and changed the course of Jewish musical history.

The musical pioneer was a composer and cantor named Abraham Zvi Idelsohn. Born in Latvia in 1882, Abraham Idelsohn worked in synagogues in Germany before moving to Jerusalem in 1905. He was an avid scholar and a passionate Zionist, as well as one of the world's first ethnomusicologists: scholars who study people through the music they create.

Abraham Idelsohn was fascinated by the diverse Jewish musical traditions, and recorded thousands of Jewish songs and tunes from Asia, North Africa and Europe. One of these was the Sadigora niggun we know as Hava Nagila.

Captivated by its upbeat melody, Idelsohn decided to create lyrics for the hitherto wordless niggun. Excited by the return of Jews to the Land of Israel from all over the world, Idelsohn seems to have wanted to forge a new Hebrew-language musical canon that would unite Jews in the nascent country of Israel. For Hava Nagila's words, Idelsohn turned to words inspired by the Biblical quote that forms part of Jewish holiday liturgy: Ze ha'yom asah Adonai, nagila v'nismecha bo, "This is the day the Lord has made, rejoice and be happy in it" (Psalms 11:24).

The words that Idelsohn penned capture much of this joyful feeling:

Hava nagila, Hava nagila = Let's rejoice, Let's rejoice

Hava nagila v'nismecha = Let us rejoice and be glad

Hava neranana, Hava neranana = Let's sing, let's sing

Hava neranana v'nismecha = Let's sing and be glad

Uri, uri achim = Awake, awake brothers

Uri achim b'lev sameach = Awake brothers with a joyful heart.

Idelsohn included this new version of the Chassidic song in a concert he helped organize in Jerusalem to celebrate the end of World War I. It became an instant hit. He later recalled the concert and its aftermath: "The choir sang it and it apparently caught the imagination of the people, for the next day men and women were singing the song throughout Jerusalem. In no time it spread throughout the country, and thence to the Jewish world".

Hava Nagila was soon sung in kibbutzim and towns throughout Israel. It became a wildly popular folk melody and was often accompanied by the Jewish folk dance the Hora. Outside of Israel, Hava Nagila soon was a standard in Zionist youth camps and later became popular at Jewish weddings and other celebrations.

In the 1950s, the song took another great leap when non-Jewish artists began recording it. One of the first singers to start performing Hava Nagila was the American superstar Harry Belafonte. Belafonte discovered the song in New York in the 1950s, and adopted it as one of his greatest crowd-pleasers. He later recalled that the two songs he was best known for were his famous "Day-O" (also called "The Banana Boat Song") and Hava Nagila.

Belafonte's most moving experience singing the hit took place in the 1950s in Germany, he later explained to the documentary filmmakers Roberta Grossman and Sophie Sartain. "It hit me kind of hard that here I was, an African American, an American, standing in Germany, which a decade earlier had been responsible for mass murder, these young German kids singing this Hebrew song of rejoicing, 'Let us have peace, Let us rejoice.' And I got very emotional."

Hava Nagila has become perhaps the most recognizable Jewish song. Olympic gymnast Ally Raisman performed to its peppy beat during the 2012 Olympics and won a gold medal in the process. In 2013, when the Korean Government sponsored a "Gangman style" musical competition in Israel, the winner was a teenager named Eva Kamun, who won with a performance of this classic song.

Artists from China to Africa to Eastern Europe and beyond all embrace the song. A search for Hava Nagila on Youtube yields well over half a million videos from around the world.

The jubilation in the song and the uplifting words convey a deeply felt Jewish truth: that we all long to transcend the challenges in our lives. That we all long to be the best people we are capable of. That all of us want to be happy. And that singing and listening to the happiness in Hava Nagila can bring us all a measure of joy.

FOOD 4 THE SOUL

Tell me you found G-d in a tidy package—I will tell you that it is not G-d, that it is a product of a clever mind.

Tell me you found G-d in the limitless beyond—beyond space, beyond time. That too is not G-d. That is just a greater mind.

Where the boundless dwells within a bounded space, where darkness shines, silence sings, bitterness is sweet and a moment lives forever, where a man and a woman live in harmony, an adult learns from a child, a warrior spreads kindness, and enmity subsides to make room for friendship and love,

where the body embraces the soul

and the soul the body,

in the union of all opposites—

—there is G-d; there is the essence of all that is real.