

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 154

Metzora | The Balance Between Humility and Pride

MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Bitter Remedy	1
Judge Favorably	8
Every Humiliation Serves a Purpose	9
Humiliation Benefits All	11
How Are Tazria and Metzora Connected?	13
Why Specifically 'Adam'?	14
G-d said, "Let us make Man"	15
Caution - The Tree of Knowledge!	17
The Great Impurity - Pride	19
An Entity Unto Itself	20
Heaven Above and Earth Below	21
Beware - Pride!	22
Leprosy - A Ladder for Ascent	25
Summary and Practical Applications	27



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Parshat Metzora

A Bitter Remedy

Rabbi Yair Weinstock recounted ("Sippur L'Shabbat", Part 3 - Page 170):

Among the first to sit in the courtyard of Rabbi Meir of Premishlan, was the veteran Chassid, Rabbi Yirmiyah of Brigel.

Rabbi Yirmiyah was one of those unique individuals who combined Torah together with wealth and greatness. He was an exceptional scholar, with a captivating countenance, and natural joy of life. In addition, he also had the merit of noble ancestors, righteous men and scholars.

Naturally, he was a role model figure for the young community members who looked at him with open admiration and imitated him both knowingly and unknowingly.

Rabbi Yirmiyah often visited Rabbi Meir's study hall, to acquire knowledge and fear of G-d.

For prolonged periods, he dwelled in the shadow of his holiness, hearing from him lessons of morality and Torah novelties that he internalized into the depths of his soul.

Rabbi Meir himself cherished him greatly and looked forward to his visits, and thus Rabbi Yirmiyah was among the most honored guests in Premishlan.

Aryeh the attendant already knew that when Rabbi Yirmiyah arrived - he should not be made to wait with everyone else. The door of the Rabbi opened to him immediately. Not to mention that every Shabbat he was present, they would honor him with an aliyah to the Torah. They would also prepare ahead of time for him, a place close and visible to the Rabbi during the Chassidic gatherings.

The fact that the great Rabbi Meir honored and favored his

Parshat Metzora - A Bitter Remedy

student Rabbi Yirmiyah, was as clear as day to all those who came to Premishlan. Rabbi Meir did not hide it, but rather showered him with honor and unlimited love.

His face shone when they would inform him of Rabbi Yirmiyah's arrival, and during his Torah lessons he would often turn toward him, as if speaking only to him and not to all the people standing around as well.

Then, one day arrived.

As usual, this time too, Rabbi Yirmiyah left his hometown and traveled to Premishlan. When he arrived, he asked Aryeh the attendant to enter, and the attendant said 'wait a moment, I will inform the Rabbi first'.

The attendant entered and informed the Rabbi, but to his great astonishment, Rabbi Meir received the news coldly. 'Rabbi Yirmiyah has arrived? Who is interested in that?! As far as I am concerned, he can take his feet and go back to where he came from!'

Aryeh the attendant swallowed hard, and then mumbled and

asked: Rabbi! What should I say to him?

Rabbi Meir answered calmly: The exact words I told you, you can add and tell him that indeed I don't want to see him at all!

Rabbi Yirmiyah had heard the answer, and grabbed the armrest of the chair nearest to him, to sit down. His mind started to spin and he felt faint, his world spun around him, and black and threatening clouds seemed eager to devour him.

Then, in a moment's decision, he decided: whatever happens, I will not budge from this doorway until I speak to the great Rabbi Meir myself.

Suddenly, the door opened, Rabbi Meir came out of the room and when he noticed Rabbi Yirmiyah standing and waiting for him impatiently, he tilted his head demonstratively to the other side and refused to look at him.

Rabbi Yirmiyah started to feel a slight grudge, and pain and anger filled his heart.

The Rabbi's close confidants tried to restore matters to their

Parshat Metzora - A Bitter Remedy

old glory. One of them entered the room again to hint that the beloved student was waiting for him with a low spirit, yet was scolded with a rebuke by Rabbi Meir: 'What does he want from me? Who needs him here? For all I care, he can go at once in peace to his home', the righteous man scolded with a loud voice that reached Rabbi Yirmiyah's ears. Eventually, the Rabbi was slightly appeased. 'Go tell our friend that if he waits for me a while as I finish receiving the public, he will be able to enter'.

Rabbi Yirmiyah stood next to the entrance, at the end of the long line with all the simple people.

He stood there and was humiliated. He wanted to flee and could not contain the great disgrace, yet each time one of the attendants held him so that he would not escape. They spoke to him words of consolation and appeasement, and explained to him that nothing had happened, surely in a little while Rabbi Meir would show him favor, 'as he had faithfully done so before', and soon it would become clear what had happened.

In the meantime, many hours passed, and every person who passed and saw Rabbi Yirmiyah waiting - opened their astonished eyes, as if to say: 'Is this the respected Yirmiyah?'

Each such pitying look tore at Rabbi Yirmiyah's heart, and he felt how the shame broke his last vestiges of self-respect. His face changed colors and transformed with every new face that saw him, and multiplied the disgrace more and more.

'**All** is worthwhile' - he comforted himself - 'in the end, the bitter will turn sweet, I will enter the Rabbi's chamber, and I will know why and for what reason I was ashamed and cast aside, and the Rabbi will surely appease me for the great disgrace he unjustly caused me'.

Finally, his turn came. He entered the room. Rabbi Meir extended merely his fingertips in greeting and said to him in sharp and clear words: 'Go home in peace, I am preoccupied with more important matters!'

Parshat Metzora - A Bitter Remedy

This was already a pill too bitter to swallow.

Rabbi Yirmiyah vividly recalled all those hundreds of welcoming and joyful greetings he was privileged to have received until this unusual and extraordinary visit.

He made a decision then and there: he would not stay for Shabbat, but would travel home immediately.

In the morning, however, a different spirit overcame him, 'It could be that certain matters disturbed the Rabbi and it came between him and me, his close confidant. But Shabbat will come, together with tranquility, and on Shabbat our close connection will be revealed as once before.

On Shabbat eve, our acquaintance hurried to seize his usual place at the Rabbi's table. The attendants themselves made sure he sat as close as possible, as they could not stand the disgrace of the once close confidant.

However, when Rabbi Meir entered the gathering and surveyed all those assembled, upon seeing

Rabbi Yirmiyah among those sitting in the first row, he looked at him sharply and said in a loud voice:

I don't understand what all the noble lineage is all worth, so what if their ancestors were great men? What of their own nobility and righteousness? They pat themselves on the back saying I am great and holy, but I say they are no more than proud beggars !'

The tense silence that ensued could be cut with a knife. Everyone present in the study hall felt Rabbi Yirmiyah's pain and shame as if it were their own.

And if that wasn't enough, in the Torah talk he gave during the gathering, Rabbi Meir spoke about the disgrace of 'the grandchildren' who rely only on their ancestors' lineage, while they themselves are devoid of spiritual content, and throughout his talk, he directed his gaze at Rabbi Yirmiyah, as if to say: 'Make no mistake, it is you I am referring to !'.

All this happened over and over again, in all the three meals.

Parshat Metzora - A Bitter Remedy

At the end of Shabbat, Rabbi Yirmiyah decided to leave without bidding the Rabbi farewell as usual and receiving a blessing.

He had already endured enough disgrace since he arrived a few days earlier, and the Rabbi had not ceased to add to his lowly spirits.

Ultimately, he decided to enter and part from the Rabbi, if not for his honor, at least for the honor of his great ancestors who didn't deserve all this shame.

However, when he returned to the room, Rabbi Meir received him with demonstrated coldness, with half-closed eyes, and told him 'Shalom Aleichem', no more.

He sought to open his mouth and ask who had brought slanderous accusations and spoke against his reputation so devastatingly, but alas, the Rabbi did not let him speak even a single word, but rather pointed him towards the door for him to exit.

Rabbi Yirmiyah now knew for sure that he would not return to Premishlan ever again. Someone, apparently, had slandered him,

and the Rabbi accepted the words without verification.

Amid these thoughts of anger, he walked back to his inn. Midway, he heard the clatter of wheels and the galloping of horses. He lifted his eyes and behold, a covered wagon was nearing towards him, and after a moment, a familiar person descended from it - the son-in-law of Rabbi Meir- the righteous Rabbi Chaim Avraham from Mikulayev.

'Why are your spirits down?' - Rabbi Chaim Avraham greeted him with a radiant face and an outstretched hand - 'You seem very upset!'

'Do you wish to pour salt on my wounds?' Rabbi Yirmiyah lashed out in deep anger.

Rabbi Chaim Avraham answered in a calming voice: 'I have just arrived, and I know nothing of the recent events, but your face teaches me that great anger resides in your heart, and as it is written: "Anxiety in a man's heart should be suppressed" (Proverbs 12:25)' - 'Let us sit together, drink something, and talk calmly about what happened'.

Parshat Metzora - A Bitter Remedy

But Rabbi Yirmiyah was hurried.

He quickly recounted to the surprised Rabbi Chaim Avraham all the events and the surprising change in his father-in-law.

He concluded: 'Know this, I will not return here again, I swear! I did not sin, nor transgress, and I have not deserved that your father-in-law should shame me so, without limit and measure'.

'Please do reconsider Rabbi Yirmiyah' - the son-in-law pleaded with him - 'Do not rush to flee, and I will go to my father-in-law to clarify what happened'.

'No' - Rabbi Yirmiyah screamed in anger - 'I do not desire favors, and I do not need intermediaries'.

His carriage began the trek back from Premishlan.

His great anger had not subsided at all. He would not accept any excuses or explanations, he would from now on join another Chassidic court, for there was no shortage of righteous men and servants of G-d.

He would go to another great Rabbi, who, if he would not honor him, at least would not shame him.

The wagon driver sped up the horses, and they galloped swiftly. The carriage approached the side of a mountain, and the wagon driver pulled on the reins to slow down their pace, as usual.

But the horses, who were accustomed to this, suddenly refused to obey, and continued to gallop briskly, and did not slow down at all.

Before the astonished eyes of the wagon driver, the horses charged ahead at full speed as if seized by a madness.

The dreadful outcome did not delay in coming, at a sharp turn the horses suddenly plunged with the carriage into the abyss. Rabbi Yirmiyah did not reach halfway down the mountain before dying a horrible death, his body torn to pieces.

The wagon driver, in contrast, remained alive and only suffered superficial injuries, to the amazement of all.

Parshat Metzora - A Bitter Remedy

The harsh news quickly reached Premishlan, and arguments began to be held as to who would enter and tell the great Rabbi Meir.

It was known for a fact that Rabbi Yirmiyah was among the deceased, but no one wanted to be in the position of: 'the fool utters evil slander'.

Reluctantly, Rabbi Chaim Avraham from Mikulayev, the son-in-law took this undesirable task upon himself and entered his holy father-in-law with a solemn and darkened face, preparing to tell him about the disaster.

'Do you need to tell me?' - Rabbi Meir told him in a sad voice. 'I know of the severe event that happened, I didn't need anyone to come and tell me about this. I knew, my son, I knew, even before the event occurred', the Rabbi told his son-in-law.

'A terrible decree had been issued on our dear friend Rabbi Yirmiyah. I saw in heaven the bitter decree and tried to sweeten it, and therefore inflicted upon him a tremendous amount of disgrace.

Oh, who can possibly describe the great shame of being disgraced?!

Disgrace is hell itself, hell on earth. A small pinch of disgrace in this world is equivalent to several years in hell and it cancels many harsh decrees.

If Rabbi Yirmiyah would have accepted his sufferings with love, the decree would have indeed been annulled.

However, he became angry and fled from here, and did not accept the sufferings he endured. Everything was in vain, they did not benefit him at all!

'Chaim Avraham, don't you know your father-in-law' - Rabbi Meir continued and said - 'is it my way to ever shame people? If Rabbi Yirmiyah had a greater understanding, he would have surely understood that I only wanted his well-being. But his pride stood in the way, and he did not realize that it is worthwhile to accept suffering and disgrace with love!'

Let us continue, with one more story.

Judge Favorably

A woman from central Israel who had two sons traveled to Be'er Sheva.

Since she had heard of the greatness of Rabbi Elazar Abuhatzeira - Baba Elazar - she offered to her sons to join her for the trip and to receive a blessing from Baba Elazar. To which they agreed happily.

Baba Elazar used to receive groups into his room, about thirty people at a time, he would bless each one individually, and then the next group would enter.

The two sons entered, each in a different place in line.

Suddenly, Baba Elazar raised his holy eyes and signaled to the attendants to 'throw out' one of the sons. Immediately, the attendants approached and disgracefully took him outside.

A short moment later, Baba Elazar raised his eyes again, and looked around and signaled to the attendants to 'throw out' the second son as well.

Understandably, both sons returned to their mother fuming with anger.

Their mother, who had faith in the wisdom of the sages, tried to calm them down and explained to them Baba Elazar's righteousness, but they were not appeased.

Since they had heard of our Rabbi Yoram Abargel, they decided to go to him the next morning.

The next day they arrived at Rabbi Yoram's yeshiva, where a long line had formed. They entered and stood in line.

Suddenly, Rabbi Yoram raised his eyes, smiled and signaled to them to come closer. They approached in fear, and Rabbi Yoram asked them: "Were you at Baba Elazar's yesterday?" And they answered: "Yes."

'And he threw you out?' They answered: "Yes."

Rabbi Yoram said: "I'll explain to you, yesterday you were supposed to be involved in a fatal car accident, and evil spirits

Parshat Metzora - Every Humiliation Serves a Purpose

hovered above your heads. Baba Elazar saw this, and by disgracing you - he annulled the evil decree!"

"**Never** speak ill of the righteous" - Rabbi Yoram concluded his words.

Every Humiliation Serves a Purpose

Have you read the above stories?

We ask you to please summarize the message of these stories.

Surely you concluded: 'From these stories, we learn that if a Jew, a Torah scholar, and a righteous person, humiliates you, do not be angry at him, but rather accept it with love, for he knows what he is doing'.

Indeed, this is a correct and an important message, but no, it was not exactly our intention in mind.

The sons left Rabbi Yoram shaken and filled with gratitude and admiration.

They once again traveled to Be'er Sheva where they were received by Baba Elazar with a glowing countenance and love.

The main point we wish to emphasize here is the power and effect of shame and disgrace.

The righteous knew that 'judgments' hovered over a certain person and to rectify them, needed to give them disgrace, the rectification is not done by itself.

By accepting disgrace that befalls a person with love, one's sins are atoned for, the judgements are sweetened, and consequently, he becomes a new, more spiritual, and pure reality.¹

...*~* Wellsprings of Wisdom *~*...

1. As written by the divine Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (Tomer Devorah - Chapter Two):

One should always think of his sins that need rectification and desire rebuke and afflictions, and say: 'What are the most desirable afflictions in the world that

will not prevent me from serving G-d?' - None are more beloved than those that involve being insulted, despised, and cursed by others, for these do not weaken one's strength and vitality with illnesses nor do they prevent one's eating and clothing, nor do they harm the life

Parshat Metzora - Every Humiliation Serves a Purpose

Well, we may think to ourselves, lucky is the one connected to a tzaddik, but what about those who have not merited this.

The truth however is that every Jew is strongly bound to G-d, and when G-d sees that the attribute of judgment hounds a Jew, He sends him disgraces that save him.

Therefore, when the Holy One, blessed be He, sends a person disgrace, he should be happy about it, and by accepting this disgrace, their sins are atoned for.²

Thus, it turns out that any disgrace, whatever its source, has a unique purpose, to annul harsh and evil decrees from upon us.

Therefore, even if the disgrace comes from a neighbor or a relative, from a spouse or an employer, it should be accepted with love and joy, and all the energy of anger and irritation should be turned into positive energy that empowers life.

Finally, before we touch upon this week's Torah portion of Metzora, let us briefly revisit the Torah portion of Shemot.

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

of one's children. Therefore, one should desire them by the following reasoning:

'**Why** should I fast and wear sackcloth and receive beatings, which weaken my strength from serving G-d, when it ultimately harms me? It is better to be despised by people and receive their insults which will not weaken my strength,' and thus, when insults come upon him, he will rejoice in them and even desire them.

2. Rabbi Eliezer Shlomo Shick wrote (Asher B'Nachal, Part 59 - Page 59):

Rabbi Avraham ben Nachman - author of 'Be'er HaLikutim' - suffered

all his life from people who persecuted and despised him.

He used to say: As is known, before receiving holiness, one needs to immerse in a mikveh to prepare our soul to receive it. It is for this reason that we immerse ourselves on the eve of Shabbat and the holidays.

Before receiving insults, we also need to immerse ourselves, for words cannot describe the great virtue of receiving insults, and the holiness that flows in their wake.

However, it is technically difficult to do so, because a person does not know when he will receive an insult.

Humiliation Benefits All

In our times, comic books have proliferated greatly. Usually, in depicting a king, they draw him as a tall and impressive figure with a shining crown full of sparkling jewels on his head.

His cold blue eyes instill fear, his speech authoritative and full of power, and a regal aura emanates from him.

When we learned about Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, we might have imagined him in this way.

However, this was not the case at all. In the descriptions of our sages, we discover a completely different figure.³

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, was a strange creature, who lacked renown or glory, despised and lowly, short in height and with a crackled voice.

Yet, despite his physical shortcomings, his power in impurity was immense and terrifying!⁴

Due to his immense impure power, he was able to distort reality, confuse minds, cast doubt, and induce feelings of inferiority in people's hearts, thus making them all no longer sure who they truly are, and eventually becoming slaves!

The people of Israel thus became slaves as well, and the slavery was terrible and full of

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

3. In the words of the Talmud (Moed Katan 18b):

Abitol the Scribe said in the name of Rav, 'Pharaoh who existed in the times of Moses - was a cubit tall and his beard was a cubit long and his member was a cubit and a thumb long to fulfill what is said: "And the lowliest of men he will establish (as king) over them" (Daniel 4:14).

4. Rabbi Isaac Luria wrote in his book Likutei Torah (Parshat Vayeshev):

The king of Egypt was called Pharaoh, for Pharaoh hints spiritually to the contracting nature of the throat, called 'Oref' - the nape, (spelled by the transposition of the letters of Pharaoh's name). This includes three spiritual aspects which are represented by: the windpipe, the esophagus, and the veins. See there for further discussion of the inner meaning of these various levels.

Parshat Metzora - Humiliation Benefits All

suffering as written: "And they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and in all kinds of labor in the fields, with all labor which they rigorously imposed upon them" (Exodus 1:14).

Words fail to describe the years of suffering and hardship that the people of Israel endured in Egypt, with commonplace beatings and torture and a harsh bondage that lasted for over 116 years continuously.

And then, the time arrived to redeem the people of Israel.

The Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to Moses and Aaron and commanded them to go and redeem the people of Israel, as it is said: "And the L-rd spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and commanded them for the children of Israel, and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to remove the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 6:13).

Rashi comments on the verse:

"To the children of Israel" - He commanded them to lead them gently and to bear them.

"And to Pharaoh king of Egypt" - He commanded them to speak with respect.

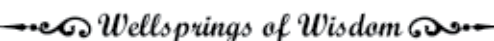
The great 'Chatam Sofer' asked on this last commentary of Rashi:⁵ To speak with respect to Pharaoh the wicked?! Does Pharaoh the wicked deserve honor?!

This wicked evildoer and monster, seemingly should have been despised, humiliated and greatly disgraced!

Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, command to honor him?

The 'Chatam Sofer' offers a novel answer:⁶

The Holy One, blessed be He said to Moses and Aaron, "know that if you disgrace Pharaoh, these



5. Chatam Sofer on the Torah (Va'era - "Vayetzavem").

6. In his words: 'It seems he wanted to caution them not to disgrace the king

which would atone for his sins, and then the plagues would not come upon him deservedly'.

Parshat Metzora - How Are Tazria and Metzora Connected?

disgraces will atone for his sins, and then the ten plagues will be spared from him! Therefore, I ask you to treat him with respect so that he can receive the punishments and sufferings of the ten plagues.

How Are Tazria and Metzora Connected?

This year is a leap year (with 13 months), and consequently, we read the Torah portions of Tazria and Metzora on two separate Shabbats. But in regular years (of 12 months), they are always combined and read in one Shabbat.

There is a connection and relevance between these two Torah portions, since both deal with the topic of leprosy (Tazria deals with leprosy of a person and garments, and Metzora deals with the leprosy of houses).⁷

Thus we see that disgraces have such a great power that they are beneficial even to a wicked and vile murderer!

We now move on to this week's Torah portion.

Moreover, Metzora is the continuation and conclusion of Tazria, for the purification of the leper, mentioned in Tazria, is discussed at length in Metzora - "This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing" (Leviticus 14:2).

Here however, there arises the question:

The first Torah portion is called 'Tazria' ('A woman conceives'), yet the subject of being purified after childbirth is only the first part of this

—*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*—

7. Rabbi Bachya (on Leviticus 14:37), states:

Ten affliction are detailed here:

Six on man: se'eth, sapachath, bahereth, boil, scab, and baldness of the head.

Four outside of the body: in a wool garment, in a linen garment, in any leather article, and on the walls of the house.

This was arranged in this order with the ten afflictions corresponding to the Ten Commandments, and when the Jewish nation observed the Torah and the commandments in the land of Israel, they were saved from these afflictions, but if not, they were struck by them.

Parshat Metzora - Why Specifically 'Adam' ?

Torah portion, while the majority of the Torah portion deals with the entirely different topic of leprosy?⁸

To add to this difficulty, not only does the concept of 'Tazria' have no relevance to the topic of leprosy, but, seemingly, they are opposites:

Tazria - "If a woman conceives and bears" (Leviticus 12:2) - indicates new birth and life. Leprosy, on the other hand is

compared to death (Nedarim 64b) - not only is the impurity compared to death, but the leper himself as well.

That being the case, how can we give the name that indicates new life and vitality to the laws of leprosy which involve impurity and death?!

While on the subject of leprosy, let us add another question.

Why Specifically 'Adam' ?

In a discourse delivered by Rabbi Yoram Zt"l (Imrei Noam, Tazria - Discourse 1), he raised the following question:

In the Holy Language of the Torah, there are four titles for the human species: Adam, Ish, Gever, and Enosh. The highest title among them is 'Adam', which refers only to individuals of a very high spiritual level.

When we examine our Torah portion, we notice that only the title 'Adam' is mentioned throughout the Torah portion as it is written: "When a person (Adam) has on the skin of his body a swelling..." (Leviticus 13:2), "If a person (Adam) has a leprous disease." (ibid, verse 9).

Why does the entire Torah portion about leprosy, which seemingly relates to people of a

—*~* Wellsprings of Wisdom *~*—

8. In the two Torah portions of 'Tazria-Metzora' there are 124 verses, which are divided as follows:

The first eight verses at the beginning of Parshat 'Tazria' deal with the laws of a woman giving birth and her purification.

After these, the Torah details all the laws of tzara'at (leprosy) in its various forms and their purification in more than a hundred verses - 59 verses in Parshat Tazria, and another 67 verses in Parshat Metzora.

Parshat Metzora - G-d said, "Let us make Man"

lower level, use the term 'Adam' which refers to people of a high spiritual level ?

Before we answer these questions, let us go back to the first days of creation.

G-d said, "Let us make Man"

Rabbi Yehoshua Startt wrote the following:⁹

On the sixth day of creation, G-d created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden.

Adam was created with a profound knowledge of the Creator's existence. This divine awareness was embedded in his soul, an intrinsic part of all his actions and all his thoughts.

This truth was ingrained within his very being, but he had to make an effort to uncover it, just as every infant is born with the basic knowledge of speaking and walking, but it must be developed from potential into action.

Is the infant aware of this knowledge ? Certainly not, it merely exists dormant within him, and when the time comes, it emerges,

even if the infant is not conscious of these powers and abilities.

Similarly, Adam was created with divine awareness and knowledge, but he did not know it, he had not yet developed a divine consciousness, and had not yet experienced the power of the knowledge that was embedded within his soul.

He was indeed aware of G-d's presence - but without understanding it, and not connected to the great knowledge that was hidden within him.

Actually, it could hardly be otherwise.

Knowledge and awareness comes when there is distinction, and knowledge of an object is relative to its absence.

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

9. Passover Haggadah with commentary from the teachings of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (page 4).

Parshat Metzora - G-d said, "Let us make Man"

Could we be aware of the day we experience if there was no night ?

Could we have been aware of joy if there was no sorrow ?

Could we even be aware of our life if there was no death ?¹⁰

Similarly, Adam could not truly be aware of the Garden of Eden around him and within him - unless he knew and tasted its absence.

Without the recognition of the possibility of lack, there can be no appreciation.

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

10. In Michtav M'Eliyahu the following is quoted (Volume 4 - Page 218):

The great Rabbi Simcha Zissel, the Sabba from Kelm, used to say: After studying, one should always summarize 'How did I think before I learned this, and what is new to me now'.

Because a person learns primarily by highlighting the contrasts.

This is the idea behind the blessing of Havdalah, to highlight the contrast between holy and the mundane, and to perceive very clearly between the extremes of holiness and impurity.

To understand that the difference 'between holy and mundane' is like the difference 'between light and darkness', and that the same difference exists also 'between Israel and the nations'.

Generally, we are accustomed to things that are contrasts and often do not feel the differences.

But a sudden event - has the power to reveal the difference.

Such a sudden change occurred to Joseph when he was raised from imprisonment to rule the land, as it is written "And they rushed him out of the pit" (Genesis 41:14). The Sforno explains on this verse: 'This is the way of G-d's salvation, which is done in a short moment, as it says: "For my salvation is near to come" (Isaiah 56:1), and as it says: "If my people would listen to me, in a moment I would subdue their enemies" (Psalms 81:14-15). So it was with Egypt, as it says: "They were driven out of Egypt" (Exodus 12:39), as our sages say that their dough did not even have time to leaven.

And so G-d vowed to do in the future redemption, as it says: "And suddenly the L-rd whom you seek will come to his temple" (Malachi 3:1).

G-d's salvation is like this because otherwise, one does not perceive that it is indeed G-d's salvation, and it is the suddenness that offers clear evidence that the salvation is indeed from G-d.

We must make an effort to be impressed by the contrasts that occur before our eyes.

Parshat Metzora - Caution - The Tree of Knowledge !

A person cannot appreciate the Garden of Eden without the awareness of the opposite reality.

Without this ability to appreciate, the purpose of creation - that G-d's benevolence towards man be revealed - could not be completed.

If G-d had granted Adam this awareness and appreciation in an unnatural way, it would have been considered a free gift, since he did not toil for it.

Caution - The Tree of Knowledge !

Adam walked in the Garden of Eden among the delightful vegetation and breathed the wonderful air full of vitality.

G-d revealed Himself to him and said: Adam, many trees grow in the Garden of Eden, and from all of them you may eat, except for one tree, which is the Tree of Knowledge (Genesis 2:16-17).

After being told this commandment, the possibility of temptation to disobey G-d's command arose.

The serpent emerged from its hiding and, with the talent of

G-d's plan however, requires that man earn, and be worthy of the Garden of Eden, through his own efforts.

Therefore, G-d gave man an opportunity. An opportunity to experience the taste of divinity. To be conscious of the Garden of Eden in which he lives. An opportunity to enter an even more sublime Garden of Eden.

He gave Man a temptation.

guile and smooth talk that G-d granted it, began to reveal evil ideas and spew heresy.

Suddenly, Adam and Eve found themselves standing against a dark and powerful force, and the battle between Adam, Eve, and the serpent began.

A new reality was revealed before their eyes, a heretical being that denied the existence of the Creator, tempting them to eat from the tree.

Our sages revealed that in fact, as a result of the darkness and the thick fog that the serpent created,

Parshat Metzora - Caution - The Tree of Knowledge!

Adam and Eve would now be able to internalize the divine awareness, amidst the terrible darkness revealed before their eyes.

If Adam had resisted and not eaten from the tree, his firm stance against the darkness, his experiencing of the pain, and withstanding the imagined absence of the Creator would have created within his soul suitable vessels to attain the light of the Creator.

However, the heart of Adam, which pulsed powerfully with love towards G-d, and desired to achieve true awareness of G-d, mistakenly believed

that witnessing darkness was not enough, and was tempted into thinking that only through violating the divine command would he appreciate G-d! That must have been G-d's true will, so he thought.

Adam thought that to merit being aware of divine goodness, he needed to experience evil in a more 'internal' way.

Thus, Adam, whose awareness of G-d was hidden deep within him, reached out to experience evil, to feel the darkness, to taste the supposed absence of divinity - and he succumbed and ate from the Tree of Knowledge.¹¹

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

11. The holy Rabbi Chaim of Sanz, of blessed memory, sat with his followers and spoke words of Torah with them. During the conversation, he spoke about the virtues of the first generations of Chassidim, the disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, and how far removed we are from their virtuous levels and then said:

When G-d created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, all the secrets of the worlds and the mysteries the divine names were revealed before him. The entire process of creation from beginning to end was open before man's eyes like an open book.

When the ministering angels saw the greatness and the immense level of his awe-inspiring stature, they began to serve him as our sages said (Sanhedrin 59b): Rabbi Judah ben Tema says, "Adam sat in the Garden of Eden and the ministering angels roasted meat and cooled wine for him."

Not long afterward came the test of eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and Adam - with the great divine intellect and light that illuminated within him - thought that he needed to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

Before he ate, he prepared himself thoroughly, with intentions and sublime

This turned out to be a dire mistake of epic proportions, and the evil that entered his inner being caused him and the

entire world to fall lower and lower.¹²

And the great flaw that resulted, was the flaw of pride.

The Great Impurity - Pride

As a result of the first sin of the Tree of Knowledge, dark desires and reprehensible traits were born in the hearts of mankind.

The first reprehensible trait that was born, was the character trait of pride.

As Rabbi Yoram Zt"l, once explained:¹³

Before Adam and Eve sinned, two holy names shone upon them:

the name 'Shadai' and the name 'Adonai'. The name 'Shadai' shone upon them from the outside, and the name 'Adonai' radiated from within them.

After they sinned, terrible and dreadful damage occurred: The letter 'Dalet' was removed from both of these two holy names, creating instead two new words. From the name 'Shadai' the word 'Yesh' (existence) emerged, and

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

unifications, with devotion of heart and mind. Rabbi Chaim of Sanz concluded, "May we merit to prepare once in our lifetime for Yom Kippur with one-thousandth of the great preparations that Adam had before eating from the Tree of Knowledge..." (Kuntres Chanoch Sanz - Part 6, Page 10).

12. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe wrote (Alei Shur, Part II - Page 70):

Adam was perfectly upright. "His body was extended from one end of the world to the other, and from the earth to the sky" (Chagigah 12b). His body had the holiness of the Temple. The level of the

entire creation was then immeasurably higher than it is now, and he prepared for eternal life in the Garden of Eden.

After he sinned, his stature was lost, as it is said: "G-d has made man upright; but they have sought out many calculations" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Rashi explains: "G-d has made man" - Adam upright. "But they" - once Eve, his wife, was paired with him and they became two and were called 'they', "have sought out many calculations" - schemes and thoughts of sin.

13. B'tzur Yarum (Volume 12, Chapter 48, Page 252).

Parshat Metzora - An Entity Unto Itself

from the name 'Adonai' the word 'Ani' ('I') was instead created.

And this is what Eve explained and said: "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate" (Genesis 3:13) - the serpent caused that humanity be consumed by the

two lowly concepts of 'existence' and 'I' - 'Yesh' and 'Ani' ('beguiled' is translation of 'Hisiani' which includes the words 'Yesh' and 'Ani').¹⁴

Thus within man's inner world, the trait that is primarily and palpably felt: Ego.

An Entity Unto Itself

To add depth to the above mentioned:¹⁵

During the six days of creation, all creatures were created and formed, and although each creation was a being unto itself and therefore different and distinct from its fellows, they were all united together.

For in the first days of creation, the unutterable name of G-d (called Havaya) shone openly, and by its power all creatures were united, for this name reveals the 'unity and inclusion' that encompasses them all together - including the foreign and the strange.

In those days only G-d's most divine light of "Havaya" shone in the world, and this caused love, brotherhood, and friendship to prevail among all creations, and also within Adam and Eve.

After they sinned, however, this light was obscured, and a new feeling was revealed - the feeling of 'ego'.

In the words of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler:¹⁶

One of the innermost recognitions within us is the recognition of our 'ego', which is the feeling of our own existence.

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

14. In the words of 'Yosher Divrei Emet' (First Pamphlet, Letter 3): 'For haughtiness is from the contamination of the serpent and the Sitra Achra, which will be eternally destroyed, while we, the nation of Israel, will stand'. See there further.

15. Thus explained the Rebbe Rashab of Lubavitch (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5659 - 'Heichaltzu', Page 228).

16. Michtav M'Eliyahu (Volume 4 - Page 32).

Parshat Metzora - Heaven Above and Earth Below

The 'ego' feels its existence as an entity unto itself, separate from any other being.

This is a deep internal feeling in every person, and because of it, it is natural for him to feel - at least subconsciously - that he comes before everyone else.

The 'ego' always strives to satisfy its desires and fulfill its deficiencies, and when it achieves them, its egoism is further strengthened.

When a person's ego is

Heaven Above and Earth Below

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler continues:¹⁷

The first perception we attain is the inner perception of 'I', but together within this perception, there is also the recognition that there is also an existence other than oneself.

This recognition allows the inner 'I' to know that it is not alone in existence.

And while this recognition exists in all people, the way they

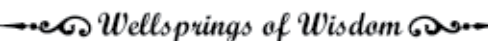
further strengthened, he is liable to pursue honor at the expense of his fellow's disgrace, leading to all the worst and most negative traits.

This feeling also covers and obscures the recognition of the Creator, for one does not want to nullify himself to Him, feeling himself and his aspirations as a separate authority from G-d, and this is essentially idolatry in a person's heart.

And we shall expand on this even more.

use this 'recognition' varies generally, and can generally be divided in two ways: with pride and with humility.

In the path of pride, the recognition of existence outside of ourselves arouses in us the desire to conquer the other, meaning we want to encompass the existence of everything outside of us within our realm of control, and want to feel that we are capable of



17. Michtav M'Eliyahu (Volume 3 - Page 267).

Parshat Metzora - Beware - Pride!

comprehending the existence of others.

When a person follows this path of pride, he becomes overly critical. He finds flaws and deficiencies in every person to an extreme degree, and it never occurs to him that perhaps there are other ideas beyond his small, pitiful perspective.

This trait is also what leads a person down the undesirable trait of speaking lashon hara (evil speech).¹⁸

However, in the path of humility, when a person realizes in his inner perception that there exists an existence other than his own, his

attitude towards that reality is one of nullification, and his perceptions expand from the individual to the collective, and from the collective to an even greater collective, until he recognizes the unity of all creation, eventually recognizing that the true unity comes only from the unified Creator.

Thus, the proper perception of 'I' is the gateway through which one may discern the all-encompassing higher existence.

Before we finally proceed to answer the questions we opened with, let us talk a bit about the dangers of pride.

Beware - Pride!

We quote from our new series 'Chelev Ha'aretz' on the dangers of pride and the advantages of humility (Part 2, page 228):

A person must know that the trait of pride nesting within him can cause him to forget the

existence of G-d, and empty the heart from any 'closeness to G-d', as written: "And your heart be haughty, and you will forget the L-rd your G-d" (Deuteronomy 8:14).

Our holy sages said in the Talmud (Sotah 4b):

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

18. Many people have pride, but it is hidden and buried in the heart, and is not visible externally.

However, a clear manifestation of pride

is the speaking of "lashon hara" (gossip), as the verse terms such slanderous speech: "A tongue that speaks great things" (Psalms 12:4). (Marpe Lashon, page 290).

Parshat Metzora - Beware - Pride!

'**One** who is haughty is as if he worshiped idols, and as if he built a high altar for himself.' Meaning, instead of engaging in serving the Creator, a proud person is busy building an altar and worshiping himself, for there cannot be two centers at one and the same time, and in the proud person, the center of his personality is so completely occupied by thoughts and fantasies about his own self, that the thoughts of the Divine is completely pushed out.

Additionally, our sages said: Anyone who is arrogant repels the Divine Presence, and it says, 'I cannot dwell together in the world with him', and rebels against the kingdom of Heaven, wrapping himself in the mantle of the King of Kings, about whom it is said: "The L-rd reigns, robed in majesty" (Psalms 93:1), and harbors heresy and a great lack of faith in G-d.

Our sages in the Talmud (Sotah 5a) say: One who is haughty is called 'an abomination', as it is said: "A proud heart is an abomination to the L-rd" (Proverbs 16:5).

They said further: Excommunicate

anyone who is haughty, he should be sawed off like a tree of idol worship; his dust will not stir to rise in the resurrection of the dead, and the Shechinah laments over him; he is considered as an idol worshiper, and as a denier of the fundamental principles of faith, and as if he had violated all the prohibitions of chastity, and as if he had built a high altar; Even if he would dedicate the heavens and the earth for the Holy One, blessed be He, like Abraham our matriarch, he will not be cleansed from the judgment of Gehinnom; his end will diminish, and he will be gathered from the world before his time, G-d forbid, and he forgets his Torah (Tosafot Yeshanim Yevamot 105a).

Pride is also the gateway to many evils and harms that exist in no other traits, (Orchot Tzaddikim, beginning of 'Shaar Haga'avah).

If a Jewish king, who is exalted above all the nation, is warned not to stumble in the sin of pride and haughtiness of heart, as the scripture proclaims: "That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren" (Deuteronomy 17:20), all the more so should other

Parshat Metzora - Beware - Pride!

people be very cautious of this sin (Ramban on the verse).

Jeroboam ben Nebat the wicked, who was a great Torah scholar, before who all the sages of his generation were considered as grass of the field (Sanhedrin 102b), and who could recite a hundred and three facets in Torat Kohanim (ibid 103b), was punished and expelled from this world and the world to come, all because of his haughtiness.

Pride is extremely disgraceful, and it is the root of many sins, both those between man and Creator, and those between a person and his fellow.

Between a person and his fellow - it causes him to harm his friend and develops hatred in his heart, and leads him into many sins, such as: gossip, defamation, lying, anger, and many more prohibitions, G-d forbid.

Between man and creator - as it is written: 'Lest your heart be lifted up, and you forget the L-rd your G-d.'

It is one of the severe sins that destroy and consume the soul, as

it is said: "Every proud heart is an abomination to the L-rd" (Proverbs 16:5), and of what benefit is all his wealth and abundance of hidden treasures if he is abhorrent in the eyes of the L-rd (Shaarei Teshuva, Gate 3, Section 34).

Therefore, every person must remove the trait of pride from his soul and distance himself from it to the utmost extreme, as written by Maimonides (Laws of De'ot 2:3) that pride is among the traits that a person should distance himself to the extreme.

It is not sufficient for a person to merely be humble, but he should be of lowly spirit, as the sages commanded (Pirkei Avot 4:4): 'Be exceedingly humble of spirit', and they further said that anyone who is haughty denies the fundamental principle of G-d's existence, as it is said: 'And your heart will be haughty, and you will forget the L-rd your G-d'.

Who is greater than Moses, the faithful shepherd, who learned Torah directly from the Al-mighty, ascended to the heavens for forty days and nights, conducted himself

Parshat Metzora - Leprosy - A Ladder for Ascent

like the seraphim, ophanim, and chayot angels, was perfected in all intellectual and moral virtues, was a giant in Torah, wisdom, and prophecy, all received directly from the Al-mighty, and the L-rd, blessed be He, spoke with him as a man speaks with his friend, and ascended thousands of degrees above the level of any created being.

Leprosy - A Ladder for Ascent

Now we finally are able to answer the questions we began with:

A person who speaks lashon hara (evil speech) is punished with leprosy.

Yet despite all this, was praised above all for his crowning virtue of humility, as the scripture says: "Moses was very humble, more than any man on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

Thus we learn that there is no greater quality in the eyes of the L-rd, blessed be He, than humility!

The reason why one might G-d forbid speak lashon hara is because he follows the path of pride.¹⁹

G-d, in His great compassion, wants to bring the person back to the path of humility, and

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

19. As Rabbi Yoram once said (Imrei Noam, Naso - Article 1):

Arrogance and haughtiness are the root of the impurity of leprosy, as can be learned from the Torah's commandment to take for the purification of the leper "cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet" (Leviticus 14:4).

Rashi explains: 'Cedar wood' - because the affliction comes due to haughtiness (this is hinted at by the cedar tree, which is the tallest of trees). 'Hyssop and scarlet' - how will he be healed? He must lower himself from

his pride like the scarlet worm and the hyssop plant.

Our sages of blessed memory said (Arachin 16a) that tzara'at comes upon a person due to the sin of slander, as hinted in the word 'Metzora' which is an acronym for 'Motzi Shem Ra' (spreading a bad name). Indeed, the underlying reason that a person allows himself to speak slander about others is the trait of arrogance and haughtiness within him, causing him to think he is a person of great value and important qualities, whereas others are greatly lacking, and have bad traits.

Parshat Metzora - Leprosy - A Ladder for Ascent

therefore, gives him the gift of leprosy.

Through this, he is humiliated in the eyes of those around him and himself, and this humiliation purifies him, sanctifies him, and elevates him to the path of the king.

Therefore, the first question we asked poses no real difficulty, because the assumption upon which it was based was incorrect.

We assumed that leprosy is a reality of death and cessation, and from this, we questioned why it is found under the title 'Tazria', which is about rebirth and new life.

But in truth, it is not so, leprosy is not a punishment; it is a cure !

True, at the moment one's body is covered in leprosy, he is considered dead, however, the outcome of leprosy is new life.

In essence, leprosy tells a person - reconsider your path.

You were on a good path, you deviated from the path, now see how to return to the King's path.

Conduct a true self-examination, reach a broken heart, submission, and thoughts of repentance, and then you will fulfill the true purpose of leprosy.

The aim of leprosy is to indicate and illuminate a hope for healing, and a path of renewal for the leper, and corrected rebirth.

Since this is the purpose of this process, it is therefore fitting to give the title 'Tazria' to the Torah portion that deals primarily with the afflictions of the leper.

Now we can also understand why in the Torah portion of leprosy, the title 'Adam' is mentioned, indicating a high spiritual stature.

This is because an 'Adam', a Jew of high stature, whose life is full of spiritual lights and who feels spiritual fire burning within his heart when he performs the commandments, might think that he is already capable and worthy to grasp the essence of others with his intellect. From the height of his spiritual stature, he might fall into the path of pride.

Parshat Metzora - Summary and Practical Applications

Therefore, to awaken him, Heaven sends various events that cause these upper lights to be closed off from him,²⁰ proving how limited his intellect is, and

how far he is from perfection, and this leads him to a broken heart.

And this broken heart awakens him to continue to walk in the path of humility.

Summary and Practical Applications

A. A person who has merited that the divine light shines within them merits to unify themselves with all of creation, for the power of the divine light is unity.

Conversely, a person whose sense of "self" is coarse and not rectified, this feeling obscures the good and the beautiful in others.

This feeling additionally covers and obscures recognition of the Creator, for a person who harbors an inflated and unrectified sense of self, consequently, does not nullify himself to G-d and feels himself and his aspirations as a separate authority from G-d, which is akin to idolatry.

B. Every person, whoever they may be, internally feels their selves, their "I", as a tangible reality.

It is through this understanding that he also perceives that he is not the only

reality, but that apart from him, there is also the reality of others.

This distinction exists in all people, but what they infer from this "distinction" varies among individuals, and is generally divided in two ways: a path of arrogance and a path of humility.

C. In the path of arrogance, recognizing existence outside of oneself evokes in one a desire to elevate oneself above others and to dominate them.

When a person walks this path of arrogance, he becomes extremely critical. He finds faults and deficiencies in every person to no end. It never occurs to him that perhaps there are others beyond his small and pitiful perspective. This trait also leads a person to speak slanderous speech.

D. However, on the other hand, in the path of humility, when a person

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

20. In the words of the Zohar (Tazria 47a): **“The** affliction of tzara'at, here the companions have taught: the meaning of

tzara'at is as its translation. Rabbi Judah said, what is its translation? ‘Seclusion’, it is secluded and not open...”

Parshat Metzora - Summary and Practical Applications

internally realizes that there exists a being apart from himself, it causes him to understand that he is just a small part of creation, a small part of the divine plan - "to repair the world with the kingdom of G-d", and this ultimately causes him to cleave to the Creator, the unifying and all-inclusive one.

E. Many people have pride, but it is hidden and buried in the heart, not visible outwardly, and sometimes they themselves are not aware of it.

But we must know that speaking slander stems from pride, for only a haughty and coarse person allows himself to speak evil about others because he thinks that he is an important person with virtue, while the other is vain and full of defects and bad qualities.

F. A person who is proud, instead of being engaged in the service of the Creator, Blessed be He, is busy building an altar for the worship of himself, for there cannot be two centers in one's heart. The haughty person is occupied by thoughts and musings about his own entity until the thought of divinity is completely pushed out.

As our sages said, one who is arrogant pushes away the Divine Presence which says, "he and I cannot dwell together in the world".

Such a person rebels against the

kingdom of Heaven, wraps himself in the cloak of the King of kings, and harbors heresy in the pure faith of G-d.

G. Our holy sages, of blessed memory, spoke at great length disparagingly of pride and proclaimed that anyone who has coarseness of spirit is called an abomination.

The Shechina mourns over him, and he is considered as if he had worshiped idols, and denied the fundamental principles of Judaism.

It is further considered as though he had committed all forbidden relations, and even were he to dedicate the heavens and earth to the Holy One, blessed be He, like Abraham our father, he will not be cleansed from the judgment of Gehinnom, but rather his end is diminished, and he is gathered from the world before his time, G-d forbid, and is punished with forgetfulness in his study.

H. Pride is very shameful, for it is the root of many sins, both those related between man and the Blessed Place, and those related between man and his fellow.

Man to his fellow - It causes him to harm his fellow and to hate him and makes him stumble in many sins, such as gossip, slander, lying, anger, and many more prohibitions, G-d forbid. The same is also true in the obligations between man and the Creator.

Parshat Metzora - Summary and Practical Applications

It is one of the severe sins that destroy and consume the soul, and all one's money, wealth and treasures are of no avail to man if he is abominable in the eyes of the L-rd, Blessed be He.

I. There are two levels of pride that correspond to two types of idolatry, the first: a person who is proud over others and is aware of it. Regarding this pride, our sages said: it is as if he worships idolatry.

There is another form of pride, which is much more severe, when outwardly one shows humility, but in his heart, he thinks there is none as great as him. This pride is rooted in the idolatry that the Torah refers to as the worship of Peor.

Therefore, every person must remove the trait of pride from his soul and distance himself from it to the utmost extent.

It is not enough for a person to be humble at heart, he must also be lowly in spirit.

Who is greater than Moses, our faithful shepherd, who learned Torah directly from the mouth of the Al-mighty, ascended to the heavens for forty days and forty nights, and conducted himself like the seraphim, the ophanim, and the cherubim angels? He was perfected in all intellectual and moral virtues, was a giant in Torah, wisdom, and prophecy, and received the Torah directly from the Al-mighty, who spoke with him as a man speaks with his friend. Moses was exalted a thousand fold above the level of any created being, and yet, he was not praised in any of these wondrous traits, but only in the trait of humility that adorned him !

Thus, it is clear that there is no trait greater in the eyes of the L-rd, Blessed be He, than humility.

Shabbat Shalom !





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Miami	7:28 pm	8:22 pm	8:59 pm
Los Angeles	7:11 pm	8:08 pm	8:41 pm
Montreal	7:28 pm	8:35 pm	9:00 pm
Toronto	7:48 pm	8:53 pm	9:20 pm
London	7:46 pm	9:01 pm	9:18 pm
Jerusalem	6:56 pm	7:46 pm	8:36 pm
Tel Aviv	6:53 pm	7:44 pm	8:32 pm
Haifa	6:53 pm	7:44 pm	8:33 pm
Be'er Sheva	6:52 pm	7:42 pm	8:31 pm

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Montreal	10:32 AM	11:42 AM	7:32 PM
Toronto	10:56 AM	12:06 PM	7:52 PM
London	10:34 AM	11:46 AM	7:51 PM

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Toronto	8:57 PM
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