

## Parashat Metzora

### Spiritual Spring Cleaning

#### The Scattering of My Extended Self

I feel a bit frazzled as I sit here in my office, writing, while all the bookcases stand gaping with their contents piled up on the floor, blocking passage through our hallway. Soon my husband will return from services and complain that it's impossible to pass here. My porch is graced with assorted kitchen furniture and utensils in various stages of being cleaned and dried. In the garden, the crabby crabgrass, that was always yellow in the winter, while in the summer aggressively penetrates the stone terrace to find its way into the vegetable garden, has been partly removed and awaits replacement. In the greenhouse, the buggy parsley is on its way to the chickens. The planters wait to be exchanged with new potting soil and basil plants. It is hard for me to focus on anything when it feels like parts of my extended self are scattered in so many different places, waiting to be put back together in a new way. I wonder if that is similar to the experience of having one's home diagnosed with *tzara'at* (spiritual skin or wall disease). In that case, "The Kohen orders the house to be cleared" (*Vayikra* 14:36), and the homeowner similarly must remove all his possessions from inside his home. Although the Torah doesn't obligate us to air out every book, toy, pot and pan in preparation for Pesach, I'm finding support for this *minhag* (custom) of Jewish women in the kabbalistic understanding of the procedures for healing *tzara'at* of the home as described in this week's *parasha* – the last one before Pesach.

#### The Hidden Treasure within Our Broken Walls

**ספר ויקרא יד:לד** כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם לְאֻמָּה וְנִתְּנִי נֶגַע צִרְעַת בְּבֵית אֶרֶץ אֲחֵיכֶם:  
 "When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as a possession, and I will give an eruptive plague of *tzara'at* upon a house in the land of your possession" (*Vayikra* 14:34).

One of my friends called for advice about the sores on her five-year-old son's body. Now beginning to dry, they were itching even more, and her son was suffering terribly. I told her that itching is a sign of healing. It often gets worse before it gets better. We can apply this principle to *tzara'at* of the home. Rashi notices that it states, "I will give the plague of *tzara'at*..." Lesions of *tzara'at* are good news for them,, because the Amorites had hidden away treasures of gold inside the walls of their houses during the entire forty years that the Israelites were in the desert. In consequence of the plague, they would be required to pull down the house and thereby discover the treasure. (Rashi, *Vayikra* 14:34). It is known that when we suffer loss there are often gains to be reaped, if only we can see with our spiritual glasses. Many of us have experienced times when our lives seemed unmanageable, yet, ultimately, brought great blessings. As we sit in the wreckage of a broken relationship, a disease or lost job, we need to strengthen our *emunah* that there is a treasure of gold hidden within our broken walls.

#### Clearing Out Spiritual Impurity from their Homes

There is an even deeper lesson to be gleaned from the procedures of *tzara'at* of the house. The *Zohar* teaches us that our intentions and words when beginning to build a home affect the spiritual state of the home. "Come and see, 'All the women whose heart stirred them...' (*Shemot* 35:26), when they were doing their work, they used to say, this is for the Temple, this is for

the Tabernacle that is for the curtain. All the artisans did the same, so that holiness would dwell on their efforts and the workmanship was sanctified. When they brought it to its place, it turned into holiness. In the same way, whoever creates something for idol worship or another unholy purpose...the spirit of defilement dwells on it... The Canaanites were idol worshippers and used to build edifices for sculptures of faces and for abominations from the side of impurity, where they would worship idols. When they started building, they spoke words of impurity that caused the spirit of impurity to rise over the building" (*Zohar, Tazria* 50b). The Zohar continues to explain, that when the Israelites entered the Land of Canaan, Hashem desired to let His *Shechinah* dwell on the land. Therefore, He inflicted *tzara'at* on the impure houses, in order that the Israelites would break down the buildings of wood and stone made in impurity, and rebuild them in purity. If the purpose of the afflicted homes was only in order to find treasures, they could have returned the stones back into their prior place and the dust to its place. Yet, scripture states, "They take away the stones" (*Vayikra* 14:30), "he shall take other mortar" (*Ibid.* 42). Thus, the spirit of impurity became removed so that Israel could dwell in holiness and the *Shechinah* dwell among them. (Rabbi Ramiel Hayyim Drizin, [http://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article\\_cdo/aid/1838176/jewish/A-Good-Plague-on-Your-House.htm](http://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/1838176/jewish/A-Good-Plague-on-Your-House.htm)).

### Spiritual Spring Cleaning in Preparation for Pesach

The halacha (Jewish law) dictates that we only remove physical *chametz* made from one of the five grains that can be made into bread or matzah (wheat, barley, spelt, oats and rye) from our homes and possessions. The source of this halacha is in the Torah:

**ספר שמות יב:טו** שבעת ימים מצות תאכלו אך ביום הראשון תשביתו שאר מצותיכם...

"You shall eat unleavened bread for seven days, on the very first day you shall remove leaven from your houses... (*Shemot* 12:15), see also (*Shemot* 13:7).

Yet this week's *parasha* alludes to a spiritual reason for removing more than *chametz* from our homes in preparation for Pesach. Pesach is a time of renewal on all levels: physical, emotional and spiritual. Perhaps, some of our possessions have absorbed spiritual impurity from our negative thoughts and intentions, words of *lashon hara* (evil speech) and gossip? When we remove our stuff from their shelves, drawers and hangers and air them out, we may not only find hidden treasures that we forgot we owned. We furthermore may clear out any possible negative energy and infuse everything we own with Divine renewal. Although, I agree that "dust is not *chametz*, and the children are not Pesach sacrifices," still dust and cobwebs hold much negative energy and clean windows clear our perspective. The Torah has compassion for the busy supermom and does not obligate us to clean away more than the actual *chametz*, which can be taken care of with little effort. If our situation does not afford us the health, time or energy to do any of the extras, Ruchi Koval cleverly teaches us [How to Clean for Pesach in One Day](#). Nevertheless, those of us who are in the position to do a little more than the bare minimum, have no reason to feel guilty to ask our family members to chip in and give a hand to clean out more than just *chametz*. There are certainly deep, spiritual reasons for the Jewish women's *minhag* of spring-cleaning in preparation for Pesach. As long as we engage in the cleaning work with the happiness of the mitzvah, we infuse new positive energy into our homes and belongings. By clearing out stuff in the process, we certainly contribute to the Pesach spirit of renewal on all levels for our families and ourselves.