

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's portion Tazria the Torah describes how the kohen was responsible for diagnosing tzaraas, a skin disease which afflicted Jews who had violated Torah ethics. A person who was suspected of being contaminated was to be brought for diagnosis before Aharon the Kohen or to one of his sons the Kohanim. Several verses in the Torah reading describe how the Kohen was to examine the affliction to determine the status of the patient. If a Kohen found the person to be contaminated, the kohen would send the afflicted person out of the camp. Being alone outside of the camp allowed the afflicted metzora to reflect on his spiritual deficiencies, allowing him to do Teshuvah - to repent, and later return to the community. (Stone Tanach, citing R'Hirsch, p.276) The kohen was not a medical doctor, but then again, tzaraas was a skin disease caused by spiritual shortcomings. Thus we see the great role that the Kohanim played in the spiritual lives of each and every Jew. The Jewish nation is sadly still wandering in the desert, in golus - exile. Whom do we look to for spiritual guidance during our current wanderings? Until the Temple is rebuilt (it should be soon) we are unable to consult the Kohanim. Rabbi Aryeh Levine of blessed memory. was well known, both in his homeland Eretz Yisrael and worldwide, for the unbridled love which he displayed to every single Jew. No act of kindness was beneath his dignity; no chesed - kindness too small. In his eyes a Jew was a Jew, and deserved to be treated like someone special. The tales of his kindness are legendary.

One such episode occurred, oddly enough, in a prison. Reb Aryeh had a custom to daven - pray on Shabbos with a group of prisoners. Arriving early Shabbos morning he would spend the next few hours davening - praying with the inmates and sharing with them words of inspiration and Torah. To these disheartened inmates Reb Aryeh's visit was the highlight of the week. Their lives were generally void of spirituality and relatively empty of all meaning. When Reb Aryeh spent time with them, it gave some measure of meaning to their lives. It made them feel special that a rabbi would make such a sacrifice and spend Shabbos with them; it was truly the best day of their week. On one particular Shabbos Reb Aryeh, as usual, trekked to the prison to daven with his unique group. In the middle of Shacharis - the morning prayers, a messenger burst into the room where they had been davening. "Rabbi — you must come — immediately!" the man shouted, urgency in his voice. "It's your daughter. Something terrible has happened." The bearer of the unfortunate news could hardly catch his breath as he had obviously run as quickly as possible to relay the information.

Reb Aryeh apologetically excused himself and hurried home. He walked out of the prison and was instantly directed to Shaarei Tzedek Hospital where his daughter had been admitted. Reb Aryeh's wife greeted him at the entrance of the hospital. She detailed the chain of shocking events that transpired that Shabbos morning. She had been preparing the Shabbos meal in the kitchen when she noticed her daughter lying motionless in the adjacent room. Her head was burning hot and she was completely unresponsive. She retold the frightening episode in its entirety, clutching her Tehillim in her trembling hands.

Reb Aryeh calmed her as they were led to their daughter's room. The child was lying there in a near-comatose state, and the doctors were at a complete loss as to what had happened to her. Around the clock Tehillim (psalms) vigils were organized as word spread throughout Yerushalayim. Heartfelt prayers stormed the gates of Heaven but none seemed to alter her frail condition. Reb Aryeh himself altered his schedule so that he could spend maximum time at his sick daughter's bedside. A stressful week passed and there was no apparent change in the young girl's condition. Shabbos came and Reb Aryeh decided that although he had not left the hospital for any other reason, he had to be at the prison minyan. How could he not? The prisoners waited an entire week for his visit. Leaving instructions as to where he could be found, he set out for the prison. As soon as he arrived a buzz filtered through the quarters, "Reb Aryeh is here!"

They couldn't believe he had come. They were painfully aware of his daughter's sad predicament and were shocked that he had come. Gathering around their Rav they inquired about the little girl's welfare. Reb Aryeh informed them that there had been no apparent improvement over the last week and that the doctors were concerned, "Hashem yaazor," (Hashem will help) he declared, the inmates witnessing the sincerity and faith in his voice.

The crowd settled down and Shacharis (morning prayers) progressed uneventfully. After Shacharis the chazzan placed the Torah down on the makeshift bimah (stand) and prepared to read from the Torah. Uzi, one of the prisoners, had the first aliyah. At the conclusion of his aliyah, the gabbai began reciting the Mi she'beirach - the prayer for the person who had the aliyah, pausing to hear the amount which Uzi wished to donate. Uzi looked around the room. His gaze settled on Reb Aryeh and he wondered if he could somehow use this moment to help alleviate his teacher's suffering. And then it hit him. "I would like to offer one day of my life to the daughter of the Rav." Reb Aryeh, startled, turned toward the bimah to ensure that he had heard correctly. "Uzi — but —" Reb Aryeh did not know how to respond. He could not believe what he had just heard. Ignoring his rebbi's protests, Uzi motioned to the gabbai to proceed with the remainder of the Mi she'beirach. The next person who had an aliyah, took his cue from Uzi and the unusually touching scene repeated itself. All those who had aliyahs offered weeks, and even months from their respective lives to Reb Aryeh's ill daughter. Reb Aryeh was completely overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and sacrifice that these men had exhibited. Finally, Maftir was announced and Dov Tamari, a middle-aged fellow with a tough exterior, strode forward to recite the blessings on the Torah. The portion was read and the group turned around to pay close attention to Dov's Mi she'beirach. Most expected him to follow suit and donate another week. Some, however, were skeptical and whispered their reservations to one another. But Dov shocked everyone with his proclamation. "What is our meaningless life in this prison worth when it is weighed against the pain of Reb Aryeh and his sick daughter? I wish to give over the rest of my life to Reb Aryeh's little girl." Not a week or a month. Not even a year. The rest of his life!

Reb Aryeh looked around at these men. Some had made mistakes during their lives, perhaps squandering opportunities given to them. But not today. Today these men achieved more than one could ever imagine. For a short time they did not seem like prisoners, rather they resembled angels. Or maybe, they were simply reciprocating to a special man by giving back a little bit of what they had received. Reb Aryeh returned to the hospital that day and was greeted by the astonishing news that his daughter had opened her eyes. No one was able to explain the young girl's sudden "miraculous" improvement. No one, that is, except for Reb Aryeh. (Reb Yechiel Spiro, p. 220, Touched by a Story.) Let us be inspired by this story to seek out qualified Torah leaders who will help us reach our spiritual potential. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**