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In the beginning of the first of this week's two Torah portions, Tazria, the Torah states: "If a woman conceived seed, and bore a male child." According to the Ohr HaChaim's commentary, this verse alludes to the Jewish people and their Final Redemption with Moshiach. "A woman" is symbolic of the Congregation of Israel; "conceived seed" alludes to the Jews' service of mitzvot and good deeds; "and bore a male child" refers to the ultimate result of this process—the birth of the messianic era.

The Final Redemption is referred to as "male" as an expression of its strength, for after Moshiach redeems the world there will be no possibility of further exiles, and the messianic age will last forever. This same concept is expressed in a midrashic reference to the tenth and final song that will be sung by the Jewish people with Moshiach. The tenth song is called "shir," the masculine form, whereas the nine songs that have already been sung are termed "shirah," the feminine form.

In order to understand why the Jewish nation is symbolically a woman we need to examine the Hebrew word for woman. Eve was called isha ("woman") "because out of man ["ish"] was this one taken." The word isha therefore expresses the woman's relationship with her husband, and reflects her innate desire to reunite with him.

Similarly, in the spiritual sense, G-d is "male," whereas the Jewish people is "female." Just as Eve was created from Adam, so too is every Jew's soul "taken" from within G-d himself, being a "veritable piece of G-d Above."

Accordingly, every Jew's innate desire is to reunite with G-d, the source of his being. Material wealth and physical pleasures can never satisfy the Jew's longing for G-d; neither can spiritual delights totally satiate this yearning. Consciously or not, throughout his life the Jew seeks this union with G-d; it is the driving force of his existence.

To continue the metaphor of the "seed," this innate desire to unite with G-d must be sown precisely in the ground, finding expression in practical mitzvah observance. A seed planted in the air will never sprout; good intentions and positive feelings toward Judaism alone will never yield the desired results. Only through actual Torah study and the observance of mitzvot does the Jew cultivate the "seed" and allow it to grow.

Of course, the underlying objective of the Jew's service in the world is its ultimate "germination"—the messianic era. Translating one's positive feelings into action—doing one more mitzvah, performing one more good deed for a fellow Jew—is what will bring the revelation of Moshiach and the redemption of the entire world. (From: Living with Moshiach, www.moshiach.net)

"A person to whom shall occur in the skin of his flesh... the plague of tzaraat" (13:2) The plague of tzaraat comes only as punishment for lashon harah (evil talk). Midrash Rabbah; Talmud; Rashi)

The Psalmist compares slanderous talk to "Sharp arrows of the warrior, coals of broom" (Psalms 120:4). All other weapons smite from close quarters, while the arrow smites from the distance. So is it with slander: it is spoken in Rome and kills in Syria. All other coals, when extinguished, are extinguished without and within; but coals of broom are still burning within when they are extinguished without. So is it with words of slander: even after it seems that their effects have been put out, they continue to smolder within those who heard them. It once happened that a broom tree was set on fire and it burned eighteen months—winter, summer and winter. (Midrash Rabbah)

Evil talk is like an arrow. A person who unsheathes a sword can regret his intention and return it to its sheath. But the arrow cannot be retrieved. (Midrash Tehillim)

To what may the tongue be compared? To a dog tied with an iron chain and locked in a room within a room within a room, yet when he barks the entire populace is terrified of him. Imagine if he were loose outside! So the tongue: it is secured behind the teeth and behind the lips, yet it does no end of damage. Imagine if it were outside! (Yalkut Shimoni)

Evil talk kills three people: the speaker, the listener, and the one who is spoken of. (Talmud, Erachin 15a)

Two birds (14:4) Because the plague of tzaraat comes in punishment for evil talk, which is an act of chatter, therefore birds are needed for his purification, because these chatter continuously with a twittering sound. (Rashi; Talmud) (chabadonline.com)

"The Kohain will isolate the afflicted one for seven days." [13:4] Seven days is in order to make sure that a Shabbat is included. In [the Kabbala primer,] Sefer HaYetzira, it is stated: "There is nothing [in this world] below worse than being afflicted by the plague (nun-gimmel-ayin), and there is no greater good [in the heavens] above than pleasure (ayin-nun-gimmel)." Since Shabbat is called 'oneg-pleasure', it has the power to reverse the nega plague. Sifsei Tzadik [translated from Sichat HaShavuah #485] (www.ascent.org.il)

One of the Rebbe Rashab's followers, Reb Monye Monissohn, was a wealthy gem dealer. Once, when they were sitting together, the Rebbe spoke very highly about some simple, unlearned Jews.

"Why do you make such a fuss about them?" Reb Monye asked the Rebbe. "Each one of them has many special and noble qualities," explained the Rebbe. "I can't see any of these qualities," said Reb Monye.

The Rebbe remained silent. A while later, he asked Reb Monye if he had brought his package of diamonds with him. Indeed, Reb Monye had brought the diamonds, but asked the Rebbe if he could display them later, when they could be seen to their best advantage.

Later, Reb Monye took the Rebbe into a different room and arranged the diamonds for him to see. Reb Monye pointed to one gem in particular, extolling its beautiful color and quality.

"I can't see anything special in it," the Rebbe said. "That is because you have to be a "maven" to know how to look at diamonds!" explained Reb Monye.

"Every Jew, too, is something beautiful and extra-ordinary," the Rebbe said. "But you have to be a "maven" to know how to look at him." (Taken from: Living with Moshiach, www.moshiach.net)

THE ALTER REBBE RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING TEACHING FROM THE TZADIK REB MORDECHAI, WHO HAD HEARD IT FROM THE BAAL SHEM TOV:

A SOUL MAY DESCEND TO THIS WORLD AND LIVE SEVENTY OR EIGHTY YEARS, (1) IN ORDER TO DO A JEW A MATERIAL FAVOR, AND CERTAINLY A SPIRITUAL ONE.

FOOTNOTE: (1) SEE TEHILLIM 90:10. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM IYAR 5)

"A single act is better than a thousand groans. Our G-d lives, and Torah and mitzvot are eternal; quit the groaning and work hard in actual spiritual work, and G-d will be gracious to you." - Rebbe Rashab