STAM TORAH

PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA 5777

“LIVING LIFE”

*In our community, New Hempstead, prior to Rosh Hashanah, Chanukah, and Pesach, three of the local rabbonim - Rabbi Chaim Schabes, Rabbi Yisroel Saperstein, and myself - speak at a joint forum, rotating which shul hosts.*

*The following is from the moving lecture that Rabbi Yisroel Saperstein presented this year prior to Rosh Hashanah[[1]](#footnote-1):*

“I want to share with you how the Intensive Care Unit in the hospital helps prepare a person for Rosh Hashanah:

“This past summer our family went through a very challenging ordeal with my wife’s health. “If a heart is not strong enough to pump, doctors can install an actual metal pump into the left ventricle, called a Left Ventricle Assist Device. There are many people who have that device in their heart. There are wires that come out of the stomach, and the person walks around with a mini computer and two large batteries for the rest of their lives.

“There came a point after they performed bypass surgery, and a valve job, when they decided that since my wife’s heart wasn’t healing well enough on its own, they would have to install an LVAT.

“Before they installed the LVAT, a social worker approached my wife and asked her why she wanted to live? This device is very stressful to live with, and therefore, before installing it, they evaluate whether the patient has a strong enough will to live, before going through the bother of the major operation to install it.

“The second question they asked was whether we had family who will help and support us throughout the ordeal? The family is necessary to assist, to constantly change the dressings around the stomach, and for moral support and encouragement.

“My wife gave satisfactory answers, proving that she had a will to live and that she had a supportive family. Shortly after, a male nurse arrived to train me and my daughter about the dressings, and other things we needed to know about caring for my wife.

“While he was training us by demonstrating on a dummy, I asked the nurse what they do if a patient in need of an LVAT is single. He replied that they wouldn’t install it. I looked at him in shock, “Do you mean to tell me that if he doesn’t have a support system you let him die?” He shook his head yes. “The person won’t be able to deal with the internal bleeding and all the other inevitable complications, so it won’t work anyway!”

“At that moment, I had a new appreciation for the power of encouragement, and how much it can help another person! If we want to do teshuva this coming year, it doesn’t have to be with new stringencies. Let’s encourage people to help them go through life. Everyone wants people to smile at them. We can start with our family members.

“That’s the message from the LVAT division of Columbia Presbyterian. If you have someone to give you chizuk, you can survive. But if not, it’s not worth all the effort because you won’t make it.

“There’s a world of lonely people. Not only singles, even married people, and children who may not come from broken homes, but from homes where they don’t get enough recognition.

“Imagine a world where everyone wanted to make sure everyone else was happy, and all our hearts beat in unison.”

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In 2010/5770, I had the opportunity to spend a week in Eretz Yisroel. On the Friday I was there I had the great zechus to attend the ‘Erev Shabbos Chumash Shmooze (lecture)’ of the late Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt’l in his home.[[2]](#footnote-2)

It was Erev Shabbos parshas Metzora and the Rosh Yeshiva quoted a thought from his rebbe, the former Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Chaim Shmulevitz zt’l[[3]](#footnote-3):

The gemara[[4]](#footnote-4) states that there are four individuals who are analogous to a dead person: One who is impoverished, a metzora, a blind person, and one who is childless.

Rav Shmulevitz explained that the reason the metzora is analogous to one who is dead, is not because of his physical suffering. Even one who suffers terribly is far better off than one who is dead. On the pasuk in Eicha[[5]](#footnote-5) which states, “Of what shall a living man complain?” the Gemara[[6]](#footnote-6) comments “It is enough that he is alive”.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Rather, the Metzora is analogous to a dead person because he must be isolated from society and cannot interact with anyone else. Living in isolation is not a life! If one cannot be a functioning and contributing member of society, he is as good as dead. Truly living means giving and helping others!

I vividly remember that, as he related this poignant idea, Rav Nosson Tzvi was shaking a great deal from the Parkinson’s Disease which ravaged his body. He was having a hard time just getting the words out. In fact, he was not able to complete the lecture, stopping mid-sentence with a nod that he was physically unable to continue. Yet, when he spoke about the gift of life, and that as long as one is alive one has no right to complain, he said it with conviction and his trademark smile.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Rav Nosson Tzvi personified this idea. He was feeble and sickly, and normal human functions which we take for granted, were often torturous for him. Yet he indefatigably devoted every bit of the energy he had[[9]](#footnote-9) to helping others and to teaching and promoting Torah. He lived with a sense of simcha just for being alive and thus able to serve Hashem. It was that indomitable will and spirit that inspired, and continues, to inspire us.

In that sense, he was more alive than most of us.

“This shall be the law of the Metzora”[[10]](#footnote-10)

“Of what shall a living man complain?”

*Rabbi Dani Staum, LMSW*

*Rabbi, Kehillat New Hempstead*

*Rebbe/Guidance Counselor – ASHAR*

*Principal – Ohr Naftoli- New Windsor*

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1. I encourage anyone who would like to be inspired to view the video of the presentation at:

   https://www.torahanytime.com/#/lectures?v=33781 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. That would end up being the final time I would have the opportunity to see and hear from the venerable Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Sichos Mussar, 5732, ma’amar 31* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Nedarim 64b [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 3:39 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kiddushin 80b [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In other words, it is a gift just to be alive, so how can he complain? [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Despite the fact that he had to cut his lecture short, he remained seated at the table shaking everyone’s hand, smiling at them, and wishing them a good Shabbos as they walked by him. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Or didn’t have… [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Vayikra 14:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)