



Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

LONG TERM EFFECTS

MRS. MICHAL ZISQUIT

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GALIA PALMER ('20)

AVICHAI SHEKHTER ('22)

ABBY DENNIS ('20)

ADINA HIRSCH ('19)

Parshiyot Tazria and Metzora both discuss the laws of *tzara'at*. It is not until this week's parsha that we see the word *metzora* (a person stricken with *tzara'at*) being used. Up until now, instead of using the word *met-*

zora, the Torah avoids the term and spells it out saying: "someone who has a patch of *tzara'at*." What is most interesting about this is that while Parshat Tazria discusses someone getting *tzara'at*, Parshat Metzora focuses on the person being cured from *tzara'at*. Why then would the term *metzora* be used only once the person is cured?

Additionally, there are two birds that are taken as part of the purification process after having *tzara'at*: one bird is used as a *korban* while the other bird is released. This

is reminiscent of part of the Kohen Gadol's Yom Kippur service, with one goat going to Hashem and the other goat going to *Azazel*, but in that case, both animals are killed; one is thrown off a cliff and one is given as a *korban*. Why then with the birds is one released?

Tzara'at is a punishment for speaking *lashon hara*. *Lashon hara* is unique in that the action is very small but the repercussions of that action are tremendous. There is a famous story in which a man approaches the Ben-Ish Chai asking him how he can do *teshuva* for the *lashon hara* he has spoken. The Ben-Ish Chai instructs the man to collect a garbage bag full of feathers and climb up on the tallest building in town and release all of the feathers. The man does as he is told and returns to the Ben-Ish Chai to hear the next step. He is then told to collect all of the feathers that he released. The man exclaimed, "but that's impossible!", to which the Ben-Ish Chai explained, "so is cleaning up the mess after speaking *lashon hara*." It's impossible to know the ramifications of your negative speech.

Because lashon hara is such a difficult challenge with such huge ramifications, a person who speaks lashon hara is similar to a recovering addict. He will never be fully free of his urge to speak negatively about others. After atoning for his sin he might not be, “someone who has a patch of *tzara’at*” anymore, but he will always be a *metzora*. The process to purify oneself from *tzara’at* involves bringing a *korban*, an action that is systematic and expected. Sending the other bird out has symbolic meaning. Just as the effects of the lashon hara you spoke are unknown, even if you atone for speaking the lashon hara, you can never take back the words; so too, the bird is released flying around somewhere.

FROM SEPERATION TO UNITY

GALIA PALMER ('20)

Many typical instances of lashon hara are attempted to be justified by stating that the piece of information is true and that the listener has a need to know this information. In actuality, however, the listener didn't really have to know this particular tidbit. Just because one is aware of a piece of gossip that's true in every way, it should not become “obligatory” to spread the news to other people. In this week's parsha, Parshat Metzora, we learn that during the times of the Mishkan and the Beit Hamikdash, if you spoke lashon hara and contracted *tzara’at* and the kohen declared you to be impure, you'd have to shave your head, take a dip in the mikvah, and leave your community for a week. And when you re-entered society, you would be obligated to perform these rituals again.

In today's society, this doesn't seem to be such a big deal. One might tell their trusted friend something fascinatingly horrible about someone else in close confidence. The listener won't tell anyone, and the two people get to laugh about the matter for a while. But in the desert, the Kohen would come along after somebody spotted some white dots on someone's skin and would have to separate the inflicted person from the rest of the community. How is this an appropriate responsibility for the kohen? Wasn't the kohen specifically commanded by God to, “bless His people with love”? Shutting them out from the community doesn't seem very loving.

During one's time in isolation, they are meant to reflect on their actions and might realize that maybe they weren't too loving either. The kohen is appointed to make the final declaration regarding a person's status of impurity resulting from *tzara’at* because that person has proven to be an obstacle to his final goal: uniting the Jewish nation. One might think that the largest threat to the Jews is perhaps anti-Semitism or anti-Zionism. However, the single largest modern-day crisis that is reducing our nation's size and unity is actually division amongst ourselves. The threat is from within.

No one Jew is mightier than his neighbor. That is why two of the items in the *korban* that a *metzora* must bring are cedarwood and hyssop. Why? Since this person stood too tall like a cedar tree and have deemed themselves to be better than others through an act of lashon hara, they must bring a hyssop to symbolize their grass-like lowliness to induce humility. But why bring both cedar and hyssop? They both seem to deliver the same message. The answer is that we need a balance. One must always stand tall and be confident in themselves, but still humble and modest.

BUILDING TESHUVAH

AVICHAJ SHEKHTER ('22)

Parshat Metzora explains the various forms of *tzara’at* that can inflict a person and his belongings. One of these forms is *tzara’at* on an individual's home. Rabbi Yehonatan Eybeschutz suggests that when *tzara’at* spreads to one's house, it leaves an impression. When the kohen declares that the blemish is in fact *tzara’at*, the individual is commanded to take out each affected stone, destroy it, and then fix the wall with fresh, pure stones.

However, just replacing stones does not necessarily mean the homeowner is spiritually clean. In order to fully complete the *tahara* process, one must cleanse his spiritual body and “replace the stones” of his *ne-shama*. *Teshuvah gemurah* means that a person has returned to his initial state of purity and is able overcome the temptation of sin the next time it arises. It is not enough for a person to just change the outside and his superficial personality; one must immerse his spiritual self in *taharah* and rebuild his relationship with Hashem. When a Jew realizes that the only truth

in this world is the Torah, he now understands that whatever gossip or slander he was speaking is useless and will only affect him negatively.

One detail of the process is that the individual must "וטח את הבית" -- plaster his home (Vayikra 14:42). Many mefarshim learn from this that no one can help the *metzora* plaster his house; rather it must be his own doing. A possible deeper explanation of this is that when a person is doing teshuvah, it must be his own will to come back to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. A person is able to seek out help from rebbeim and teachers to guide him on his path to teshuvah, but teshuvah can not be forced. Teshuvah requires effort and toil, and only after one has worked hard at achieving a relationship with Hashem can he attain teshuvah.

May we all strive to realize the glory and splendor of having a relationship with Hashem, and appreciate the fact that we can attach ourselves to Him on the highest level, in the purest way possible. After we have done so, may we merit to replace the impure bricks of the third Beit Hamikdash with bricks of mitzvot and *taharah*.

SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

ABBY DENNIS ('20)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Metzora, the Torah addresses the topics of *tumah*, impurity, and *tahara*, purification. Throughout the parsha, when different forms of *tzara'at* are mentioned, the phrase והוּבָא אֵל הַכֹּהֵן -- "and he is brought to the kohen" (14:2) is repeated. On the other hand, when the Torah mentions the nazir in Parshat Naso, we see a discrepancy in the word choice. Instead of, "and he is brought to the Kohen," the Torah uses the words וַיָּבֵיא אֹתוֹ, "and he will bring himself" (Bamidbar-6:13).

Rav Yerucham explains that a Nazir is someone who is trying to get close to Hashem on his own; he is able to control himself and the decisions he makes. A *metzora* is exactly the opposite. A person with *tzara'at* must be dragged to the kohen since he doesn't have the strength and courage to come on his own. He is "missing a backbone." We learn to be like the nazir who is strong in his commitment to Hashem,

as opposed to the *metzora* who doesn't know what is right and is easily influenced by others.

At the beginning of the Shulchan Aruch, the Rama comments that one should not be embarrassed in front of people when it comes to their commitment to *avodat Hashem*. We often make choices in life based on what we think others will think or say about us. We learn from this week's parsha to stay true to what we believe in and do the right thing, no matter what anyone else has to say about it.

HOLY PLACE, HOLY NATION

ADINA HIRSCH ('19)

Parshat Metzora continues Parshat Tazria's discussion of *tzara'at*. Parshat Metzora explains the purifying process to remove *tzara'at* and different cases from which someone can get *tzara'at*. One place that *tzara'at* can affect a person is in their home:

”כִּי תֵבֹאוּ אֶל-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְכֶם לְאֶחְזָה וְנִתְתִּי
נִגַע צֹרַעַת בְּבַיִת אֶרֶץ אֶחְזִיתְכֶם”

“When you enter the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I inflict an eruptive plague upon a house in the land you possess” (14:34).

Many different questions arise from this pasuk. Why would someone get *tzara'at* on their home, instead of on their body or their clothes? Why can Bnei Yisrael only get *tzara'at* on their homes when they are in Israel? And why do Bnei Yisrael have to destroy their homes if they get *tzara'at*?

The most classic answer to this question is given by the Midrash Rabbah, which explains that the Amorites hid gold in the walls of their houses for the 40 years Bnei Yisrael were in the desert in fears that whoever would conquer them would plunder all their riches. According to this interpretation, Bnei Yisrael had to destroy their houses when the walls became afflicted with *tzara'at* in order to uncover the gold that the Amorites had hidden.

The Or HaChaim suggests that one gets *tzara'at* on their house as a punishment for stinginess, as refer-

enced in the gemara (Erachin 16a). When a house gets *tzara'at*, the person is forced to remove all their possessions from within their home. All their possessions are put on public display and everyone sees how many objects and how much wealth that person has. This *tzara'at* on the home forces Bnei Yisrael to be generous and share their wealth with others because now everyone knows how many possessions they have.

The Sifra explains that Bnei Yisrael could only get *tzara'at* on a permanent home constructed of stones, wood, or earth. According to this understanding, there is no actual connection of *tzara'at* and the land of Israel. *Tzara'at* on homes just happened to start in Israel because that is the first place Bnei Yisrael actually settled in.

Both the Chizkuni and the Ibn Ezra believe that this form of *tzara'at* is contingent on Israel due to the sanctity of the land. The Chizkuni explains that when *tzara'at* breaks out on a house, the house must be destroyed. He notes that this is only because this type of *tzara'at* occurred in Israel; Israel is a holy land and can't handle all the impurity and contamination that causes *tzara'at*; therefore, the entire house must be destroyed. The Ibn Ezra says that these laws apply only in Israel because of Israel's added *kedushah* of hosting the Beit Hamikdash and Hashem's presence.

The purpose of *tzara'at* on homes in Israel was meant to make sure Bnei Yisrael developed into a generous and *kadosh*, pure, nation worthy of being rewarded with riches when they permanently settled in Israel. The land of Israel is extremely special and holy, and only kind and spiritual people are privileged to live comfortably and successfully in the land. As Jewish people, it is our responsibility to transmit these values and merit to live in the most holy land, Israel.



Staff

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DEVELOPERS

MAX FROHLICH (' 21)

DOVID ZAK (' 19)

A KYHS PARSHA PUBLICATION



RAVH@YESHIVAHS.ORG