

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Tzara'as, the condition that occupies the bulk of parshios Tazria and Metzora, is characterized by the Talmud as a punishment for sins like speaking ill of others or stinginess at their expense. Thus the Rambam considers it something other than an infection in the normative, medical sense. Other Rishonim (e.g. Daas Zekeinim, Chizkuni), though, seem to regard the condition, at least when it manifests in a human body (it can also affect material and walls) as contagious, evidenced in the requirement that a person with the skin condition "sit alone" outside the camp of the general population (Vayikra 13:46).

Others regard that mandated isolation -- which enjoins the afflicted person to call out to passers-by the fact that he is "Impure! Impure!" -- as a punishment in itself, or as an opportunity to meditate on his sin (e.g. Sefer HaChinuch).

The Lutzker Rav, Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, zt"l (1881-1966), in his Oznayim LaTorah, takes that latter approach to a higher level, observing that the interpersonal sins that brought about the metzora's condition were born of his dismissive, negative view of other people, his self-centeredness and misanthropy. Thus, he felt no compunctions about speaking ill of others or withholding things from them.

So, suggests Rav Sorotzkin, the metzora's isolation may be intended to sensitize him to the importance of society. His being cut off from others will eventually be torturous. Like, Rav Sorotzkin adds, interestingly, the fictional Robinson Crusoe, who, shipwrecked and isolated on a remote island, is tormented by lack of interaction with others. The famous novel's author (Daniel Defoe) "vividly portrays [Crusoe's] longing for human interaction and conversation."

The isolated metzora, writes Rav Sorotzkin, will feel similar pain, and thereby come to realize that the world contains others, others whose existence and whose needs he must value.

The metzora's calling out of his plight to others, Rav Sorotzkin continues, is intended to inspire them to pray for his recovery. So, added to his existential loneliness, the metzora's dependence on others will help cure him of his



misanthropy. © 2023 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

The Rabbis moralised the condition of tzara'at -- often translated as leprosy -- the subject that dominates both Tazria and Metzora. It was, they said, a punishment rather than a medical condition. Their interpretation was based on the internal evidence of the Mosaic books themselves. Moses' hand became leprous when he expressed doubt about the willingness of the people to believe in his mission (Ex. 4:6-7). Miriam was struck by leprosy when she spoke against Moses (Num. 12:1-15). The metzora (leper) was a motzi shem ra: a person who spoke slightly about others.

Evil speech, lashon hara, was considered by the Sages to be one of the worst sins of all. Here is how Maimonides summarises it: "The Sages said: there are three transgressions for which a person is punished in this world and has no share in the world come -- idolatry, illicit sex, and bloodshed -- and evil speech is as bad as all three combined. They also said: whoever speaks with an evil tongue is as if he denied God... Evil speech kills three people -- the one who says it, the one who accepts it, and the one about whom it is said." (Hilchot Deot 7:3)

Is it so? Consider just two of many examples. In the early 13th century, a bitter dispute broke out between devotees and critics of Maimonides. For the former, he was one of the greatest Jewish minds of all time. For the latter, he was a dangerous thinker whose works contained heresy and whose influence led people to abandon the commandments.

There were ferocious exchanges. Each side issued condemnations and excommunications against the other. There were pamphlets and counter-pamphlets, sermons and counter-sermons, and for while French and Spanish Jewry were convulsed by the controversy. Then, in 1232, Maimonides' books were burned by the Dominicans. The shock brought a brief respite; then extremists desecrated Maimonides' tomb in Tiberius. In the early 1240s, following the Disputation of Paris, Christians burned all the copies of the Talmud they could find. It was one of the great tragedies of the Middle Ages.

What was the connection between the internal Jewish struggle and the Christian burning of Jewish books? Did the Dominicans take advantage of Jewish accusations of heresy against Maimonides, to level their

own charges? Was it simply that they were able to take advantage of the internal split within Jewry, to proceed with their own persecutions without fear of concerted Jewish reprisals? One way or another, throughout the Middle Ages, many of the worst Christian persecutions of Jews were either incited by converted Jews, or exploited internal weaknesses of the Jewish community.

Moving to the modern age, one of the most brilliant exponents of Orthodoxy was R. Meir Loeb ben Yechiel Michal Malbim (1809-1879), Chief Rabbi of Rumania. An outstanding scholar, whose commentary to Tanach is one of the glories of the nineteenth century, he was at first welcomed by all groups in the Jewish community as a man of learning and religious integrity. Soon, however, the more 'enlightened' Jews discovered to their dismay that he was a vigorous traditionalist, and they began to incite the civil authorities against him. In posters and pamphlets they portrayed him as a benighted relic of the Middle Ages, a man opposed to progress and the spirit of the age.

One Purim, they sent him a gift of a parcel of food which included pork and crabs, with an accompanying message: 'We, the local progressives, are honoured to present these delicacies and tasty dishes from our table as a gift to our luminary.' Eventually, in response to the campaign, the government withdrew its official recognition of the Jewish community, and of Malbim as its Chief Rabbi, and banned him from delivering sermons in the Great Synagogue. On Friday, 18 March 1864, policemen surrounded his house early in the morning, arrested and imprisoned him. After the Sabbath, he was placed on a ship and taken to the Bulgarian border, where he was released on condition that he never return to Rumania. This is how the Encyclopaedia Judaica describes the campaign: "M. Rosen has published various documents which disclose the false accusations and calumnies Malbim's Jewish-assimilationist enemies wrote against him to the Rumanian government. They accused him of disloyalty and of impeding social assimilation between Jews and non-Jews by insisting on adherence to the dietary laws, and said, 'This Rabbi by his conduct and prohibitions wishes to impede our progress.' As a result of this, the Prime Minister of Rumania issued a proclamation against the 'ignorant and insolent' Rabbi... In consequence the minister refused to grant rights to the Jews of Bucharest, on the grounds that the Rabbi of the community was 'the sworn enemy of progress'."

Similar stories could be told about several other outstanding scholars -- among them, R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes, R. Azriel Hildesheimer, R. Yitzhak Reines, and even the late Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik of blessed memory, who was brought to court in Boston in 1941 to face trumped-up charges by the local Jewish community. Even these shameful episodes were only a continuation of the vicious war waged against the Hassidic movement by their opponents, the mitnagdim, which saw many

Hassidic leaders (among them the first Rebbe of Habad, R. Shneur Zalman of Ladi) imprisoned on false testimony given to the local authorities by other Jews.

For a people of history, we can be bewilderingly obtuse to the lessons of history. Time and again, unable to resolve their own conflicts civilly and graciously, Jews slandered their opponents to the civil authorities, with results that were disastrous to the Jewish community as a whole. Despite the fact that the whole of rabbinic Judaism is a culture of argument; despite the fact that the Talmud explicitly says that the school of Hillel had its views accepted because they were 'gentle, modest, taught the views of their opponents as well as their own, and taught their opponents' views before their own' (Eruvin 13b) -- despite this, Jews have continued to excoriate, denounce, even excommunicate those whose views they did not understand, even when the objects of their scorn (Maimonides, Malbim, and the rest) were among the greatest-ever defenders of Orthodoxy against the intellectual challenges of their age.

Of what were the accusers guilty? Only evil speech. And what, after all, is evil speech? Mere words. Yet words have consequences. Diminishing their opponents, the self-proclaimed defenders of the faith diminished themselves and their faith. They managed to convey the impression that Judaism is simple-minded, narrow, incapable of handling complexity, helpless in the face of challenge, a religion of anathemas instead of arguments, excommunication instead of reasoned debate. Maimonides and Malbim took their fate philosophically. Yet one weeps to see a great tradition brought so low.

What an astonishing insight it was to see leprosy -- that disfiguring disease -- as a symbol and symptom of evil speech. For we truly are disfigured when we use words to condemn, not communicate; to close rather than open minds; when we use language as a weapon and wield it brutally. The message of Metzora remains. Linguistic violence is no less savage than physical violence, and those who afflict others are themselves afflicted. Words wound. Insults injure. Evil speech destroys communities. Language is God's greatest gift to humankind and it must be guarded if it is to heal, not harm. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* © 2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Then he shall sprinkle [the mixture] seven times upon the person being purified from the tzara'at; he shall purify him and set the live bird free upon the open field (Leviticus 14:7). One of the strangest and most primitive-sounding rituals of the Bible surrounds the purification of the individual afflicted with "tzara'at," a skin disease that apparently, at least in biblical times, struck

those guilty of slanderous gossip (metzora – one who is afflicted with tzara'at derives from motzi-ra, an individual who spreads evil talk). Because the root cause of the malady was spiritual rather than physiological, it was the priest – the kohen – rather than a doctor who had the responsibility of examining the white spots that appeared on the skin of the individual to determine whether quarantine was necessary, and then – if he was able to declare the person free of the disease – initiating a process of purification.

It is with this particular ritual that our portion of Metzora opens. The kohen commands two birds to be taken; the first to be slaughtered in an earthenware vessel, its blood mingled with the living waters of a spring, and the second – kept alive – to be immersed within the mingled blood waters in the earthenware vessel. The waters are sprinkled upon the person cured of the malady, whereupon the live bird is allowed to fly away, leaving the city limits.

This ritual act of purification is fraught with symbolism. There are few biblical infractions as serious as speaking slander; three different prohibitions recorded in Scripture proscribe such speech. The first is gossip regarding another, which may in itself be harmless, but which is no one else's business and can easily lead to evil talk (the prohibition of rechilut – when, for example, one tells another the cost of a neighbor's new house). The second is lashon hara – downright slander – reporting the negative action of another which may actually be true but ought not be spread.

The third and worst of all is motzi shem ra – disseminating a lie about an innocent person. From such unnecessary chatter, reputations can be broken, families can be destroyed and lives can be lost (“with the negative turn of their noses, they can become responsible for the death of another”).

Hence, three people incur penalty for such talk: the one who tells it, the one who listens to it and the one who spreads it further. And when the Kohen Gadol (high priest) appears once a year before God in the Holy of Holies with the incense sacrifice, it is for this infraction against slander that he seeks atonement on behalf of the Jewish nation.

With this in mind, let us analyze the symbolism of the purification process. In idolatry, the point of offering a sacrifice was to propitiate the gods – idolaters believed that the world was run by the warring gods and humans could only seek to bribe them. In Judaism, by contrast, humans are full partners with God in perfecting this world. Our sacrifices represent the one who brings them, with the sin-offering animal standing in the place of the owner, “telling” him that it is he who deserved to die but for Divine loving-kindness, and the whole burnt offering “telling” him that he ought devote “all of himself” to the service of the Almighty in the perfection of the world.

In the case of the metzora, the slanderous,

scandalous chattering twitters are symbolized by the two birds; one is slaughtered as gossip is considered akin to taking a life, and the other is sent off to fly away.

The best way to explain this symbolism is by means of a remarkable Hassidic story told of someone who asked his Rebbe how he might gain Divine forgiveness for his sin of slander. The Rebbe instructed him to confess his sin and beg forgiveness of those whom he had slandered; then he instructed him to take a feather pillow, bring it to the marketplace late in the afternoon when the wind was strongest, to open the covering, allow the feathers to fly, and then set about collecting all the scattered feathers.

The distraught Hasid returned to the Rebbe that evening, reporting that gathering the feathers was a “mission impossible.” “So is it with slander,” replied the Rebbe; “You never know how far your evil words have spread, since each person you told may well have told his friends...”

Rav Yisrael Salanter explained why the portions Tazria and Metzora follow Shemini, with its laws of kashrut: because what comes out of your mouth is even more significant than what goes into your mouth.

Eleanor Roosevelt is credited with saying this: “Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, small minds discuss people.” ©2023 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The laws regarding ritual purity and the metaphysical disease of tzorot, which by the way is not the medically recognized disease of leprosy, affect three categories of human life and society – the human body, clothing and houses. These three areas of human societal existence are the basic building blocks of civilization and society generally. They are the most vital and at the same time the most vulnerable areas of our existence. And it is apparent that the Torah wishes us to be aware of this fact.

Health of body is a necessary precedent to most cases of human accomplishment. Not many of us are able to rise over illness, pain and/or chronic discomfort on a regular and permanent basis. Medical science recognizes that our mood and our mind affect our physical state of wellbeing. The Torah injects into this insight that our soul also has such an effect as well.

The rabbis specifically found that the distress caused to one's soul by evil speech, slander and defamation reflects itself physically in the disease of tzorot. In biblical times, hurting other human beings by the intemperate use of one's tongue, had clear physical consequences that served as a warning of the displeasure of one's soul at such behavior. The human body is our mainstay. It is also the most fragile and vulnerable to decay and discomfort. It is only logical that it is in this area of our existence that the possibility of

tzsorat lurks and lingers.

Clothing represents our outer representation of ourselves to the society around us. Originally, as described in the Torah itself, clothing was meant to shelter us from the elements and to provide us with a sense of privacy and modesty in covering our nakedness. As humanity evolved and developed, clothing became a statement of personality and even of the mental and spiritual nature of the person.

Clothing also became an instrument of hubris, competitiveness and even of lewdness. It also became vulnerable to the distress of the soul over its use for essentially negative purposes. And in biblical times, the angst of the soul translated itself into tzsorat that affected clothing directly.

And finally, tzsorat was able to invade the physical structure of one's dwelling place. One is entitled to live in a comfortable and attractive home. All of the amenities of modern life are permitted to us. But the Psalmist warned us that we should be careful not to make our homes our "graves." Homes, by their very nature, are temporary and transient places.

Our father Avraham described himself as a wandering itinerant on this earth. Again, as in all areas of human life, the Torah demands of us perspective and common sense when dealing with our homes. We gawk with wonder when visiting palaces and mansions of the rich and famous yet our inner self tells us that this really is not the way that we wish to live. The vulnerability of homes and houses to tzsorat is obvious to all.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

After explaining the laws of childbirth, the laws of the metzora are presented (Leviticus 13). While many translate metzora as leprosy, in truth there is no exact English equivalent. In general, it refers to a person afflicted with a rare skin disease.

The rabbis associate metzora with the sin of slander (Arachin 16a). Thus, a similarity exists between metzora and motzi shem ra (the Hebrew words for speaking evil about another; Arachin 15b). Perhaps, for this reason, the metzora is sent outside the camp, allowing for a period of solitude, to reflect on the dangers of bad speech.

Injurious speech can have enormous negative ramifications. As kids, we would say, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never harm me." This maxim is not true. Words and name calling can hurt deeply. Once a word has been said, it is almost impossible to take back, for a spoken word spreads to others in ways that can never be undone. This is

certainly true when emails or tweets are sent; they remain forever on the record, in the cloud for all time.

The saintly Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, compares the effects of slander to casting a slashed feather pillow out the window. As it is impossible to collect each scattered feather, so too is it impossible to nullify slander, as it quickly spreads too far and too wide. The damage can never be fully undone.

It also should be remembered that while a word is a word, and a deed is a deed, words lead to deeds. Bad actions are the culmination of bad thoughts and bad words.

Metzora may not only explore the concept of harmful speech but the failure to speak kindly – to a coworker or assistant in need of a word of encouragement, a parent in need of a word of gratitude, a child in need of a word of support, a spouse in need of a loving word.

The banishment of the metzora outside the camp may underlie the mystical practice prevalent to this day of ta'anit dibbur (a "speech fast"). For a day or more, perhaps alone, perhaps under supervision, one doesn't speak. The time, hopefully, is used to assess the power of speech, the importance of avoiding harmful words and of saying good ones.

A rabbi was once asked to name the most expensive meat. He responded, "tongue." The next day, the rabbi was asked to name the least expensive meat. Here again, the response was, "tongue."

Such is the challenge of speech, and such may be the message of the metzora laws. ©2023 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

DR. ERICA BROWN

Taking the Lead

This double Torah reading of Tazria and Metzora is among the most challenging in the Torah. It is about a spiritual skin affliction that we erroneously call leprosy, its many variations, and the places it can reach: one's body, one's clothing, and even one's house. Instead of going to the ancient equivalent of a dermatologist, the person infected notifies the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest. If the illness is spiritual with a physical manifestation, then the doctor, too, must be a spiritual one. Who better than the High Priest to diagnose the rash?

When a person has on the skin of the body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of the body, it shall be reported to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests. The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of the body: if hair in the affected patch has turned white and the affection appears to be deeper than the skin of the body, it is a leprous affection; when the priest sees

it, he shall pronounce the person impure. (Lev. 13:1-2)

The priest has the unenviable job of declaring the sufferer impure and has the more promising job of declaring that same person free of tzara'at when the inflammation disappears: "...the priest shall pronounce the person pure. It is a rash; after washing those clothes, that person shall be pure" (Lev. 13:6). Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra on 13:1 writes that, "This commandment was directly communicated to Aaron because all human maladies shall be determined according to his pronouncement. Aaron shall declare who is clean and who is unclean." The fate of this sick person weighed on the priest's shoulders.

On the same verse, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch observes that "naming Aaron next to Moses at the introduction to certain laws...is to indicate the quite special importance of these laws, not only for the theoretical understanding of these laws and the establishment of them for practical use in life...but also for the training and education of all the individual people..." What education might the community need from Aaron's inclusion in this supervisory role?

When it comes to this diagnosis, we might expect three people to weigh in on the problem because in most cases of Jewish law, a person presents his or her case before a *beit din*, a Jewish court of three. In two places in the Talmud, however, we learn that only one priest is necessary to determine this malady: "The verse states, 'And he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests' (Lev. 13:2). Learn from this that even one priest may view leprous marks" (BT Nidda 50a, BT Sanhedrin 34b). One priest alone is trusted in this role. Again, our question is why?

One answer may lie in a distinction Rabbi Jonathan Sacks makes in his book *Ceremony & Celebration* between the role of a prophet and that of a priest: "The prophet lives in the immediacy of the moment, not in the endlessly reiterated cycles of time... The priest represents order, structure, continuity, the precisely formulated ritual followed in strict, meticulous obedience." Assigning the priest the task of identifying tza'rat, leprous boils, and then declaring the disease over is a way to reinstate order into a situation of chaos because everything that surrounds the sufferer is at risk of infection. Rabbi Sacks continues his description of the priest's foundational orientation: "For the priest, the key words of the religious life are *kadosh*, holy, and *tahor*, pure. To be a Jew is to be set apart: That is what the word *kadosh*, holy, actually means. This in turn has to do with the special closeness the Jewish people have to God..." We can extrapolate from here that because the priest is exquisitely sensitive to purity and can make fine distinctions between what is pure and impure, it only takes one priest to make the designation.

Another approach is to think of the priest in this role as a leader doing a job that others may shun for fear of infection. The declaration was likely humiliating to the

individual afflicted, alienating him society and from those he loves. This fear of disease may have also led others to marginalize the leper and refuse to usher him back into the community at the earliest possible time. We can trust that one priest, sanctified and prepared to face the challenge, would do his very best to ensure fair and efficient treatment because he represents God. Of all people, it is the priest who should see the divine in others and remove any barrier to achieving godliness.

The priest, by modeling these difficult activities, also helped others reintegrate the sufferer. After all, if the holiest person in the community declares a person afflicted safe to return to normal life, then that declaration must be good enough for everyone. The leader sets the standard of care and concern for others. Dr. Tracy Brower claims that, "One of the most significant responsibilities as a leader is to model the way" ("How To Lead Through Hard Times: The 5 Most Important Things To Know," *Forbes* Aug. 16, 2020). When it comes to managing others, she writes, "People pay attention to you as a manager—perhaps more than you realize—including what you say, how you react and the decisions you make."

She also adds that when leading through hard times, the leader must stay "connected to key information. As leaders rise in the hierarchy, they run the risk of being increasingly insulated from key information because people are taught to bring them solutions, not problems. To be resilient, you must be informed, so do all you can to ask for difficult details as much as you seek solutions." The priest's knowledge of every boil and scale and his intimate involvement with all stations of society in this diagnosis kept him connected to key information and close to those he ultimately served.

Brower makes another striking point. "Sometimes leaders may avoid asking too many questions because they fear being invasive." She states that in one study about the mental health and wellness of employees, "...employees felt better when leaders checked in and demonstrated they cared. Take cues from people about whether they want to talk through issues, and back off if they don't. But be clear about the fact that you are paying attention." The priest in this week's Torah reading asked lots of questions. He had to pay attention, and attention is something that followers crave from leaders. The questions he asked the person afflicted were a way of intently focusing on the problem and potential solutions in the life of one person from someone who cared profoundly.

Brower offers another role that leaders play in hard times. They provide psychological safety: "a feeling that employees are secure, can take appropriate risks and bring their best to their work." Knowing that the High Priest had this body of information and would use it to ameliorate the lives of any Israelite provided psychological safety to the community.

So, as a leader, describe how you provide

psychological safety and acute concern to those you lead. © 2023 Dr. E. Brown and Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership

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Infected Clothing

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Not only can *tzara'at* (a skin disease often translated as leprosy) make a person impure, it can make clothing impure as well. However, there is something unusual about an impure item of clothing. Once it becomes impure, no benefit may be derived from it. The source for this is *Vayikra* 13:52, which refers to "*tzara'at mam'eret*" ("a leprous malignancy") which must be burned. Our Sages expound: "*Ten bo me'erah* (destroy it) – do not derive benefit from it." The prohibition applies not only to an item of clothing that has been definitely identified as infected, but even to one that has been put aside as suspicious and is awaiting the *Kohen's* pronouncement. Whether or not it is prohibited to derive benefit depends on whether or not the clothing is considered to be leprous. An item which has been put aside is already defined as infected, even though it does not yet have to be burned.

In light of what we have written, the opinion of the Rambam in his Commentary on the Mishnah (*Nega'im* 11:12) is surprising.

The Rambam states that it is forbidden to derive benefit from an infected item of clothing because one must burn it. However, as we have seen, even during the time the garment is merely set aside, it is forbidden to derive benefit from it, even though it is not liable to destruction by fire! Furthermore, in order for a piece of clothing to be declared impure, it has to be at least the size of an olive. Yet one is forbidden to derive pleasure from an infected item of clothing even if it is smaller than an olive. Thus, one can have an infected item which is not technically impure. Nevertheless, it is forbidden to derive benefit from it! It would seem then that despite the Rambam, it is not the obligation to burn the clothing which is responsible for the prohibition of deriving benefit from it.

There is an additional difficulty with the Rambam. For it is not prohibited to derive benefit from every item which must be burned. For example, *terumah* which has become impure must be burned, but in the meantime one may derive benefit from it. We are left with a question. It's not a big deal, but it is a challenge. Maybe you can come up with an explanation. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Curing the Virus

The double parasha of Tazria-Metzora contains the laws involving the person who is punished with "leprosy" for one of many different sins though likely for the sin of *lashon hara*, gossip. Tazria mostly explains

the different ways that this affliction, which is often mistranslated as "leprosy," manifests itself on the body, the hair, or the clothing of the sinner. Metzora, though containing one further area of affliction of the walls of the house, primarily deals with the procedures by which the afflicted person becomes purified and may rejoin the community.

At the beginning of this parasha, we find a *pasuk* which enables us to demonstrate the intensity of the way in which the Torah is analyzed to determine many of the laws. Since the Torah is very concise and is also the direct words of Hashem, one must study each word to understand the complete message from Hashem. Parashat Metzora begins with the words: "This shall be the law of the Metzora on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the Kohein." The Or HaChaim explains that this entire phrase appears to be superfluous as we could simply say, "when the Metzora becomes purified, he is brought to the Kohein." Since we know that Hashem chose to state this law in this form, our Rabbis discuss each word and phrase to help us comprehend much of what is not directly stated yet still understood to be an integral part of the law.

The Or HaChaim tells us that the word "this" excludes the case where a Metzora brings his offering on a personal altar and not on the Temple Altar. He demonstrates that "this" must be understood as "this and not that." The word "t'ih'yeh, shall be" indicates that the Metzora will still be able to be purified even in the future, which, at that time, meant when the Temple would not exist. The third word, "Torah," implies that there is a singularity (uniformity) ascribed to the purification process, even though there are differences in the way that a Metzora can be declared. As an example, there are some forms of *Tzaraat* (the disease of the Metzora) that can be declared upon the first sighting by a Kohein, whereas there are other forms which require that the Kohein return in a week's time before declaring that a person or object has *Tzaraat*. We learn that with all cases, the procedure for purification remains the same. The word, "bayom, on the day," teaches that the purification process for the Metzora must be done only in the daytime. This applies only to the major parts of the purification process: slaughtering the bird, sprinkling the blood, and shaving the Metzora's hair. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that "on the day" also indicates that the moment that the Metzora notices a diminishing of the affliction, he should immediately send for the Kohein to assess his change in status. The other parts of the process, which include the taking of the birds, washing the Metzora's clothing, and the Metzora's immersion in the "living waters," are not required to be performed in the daytime.

The final part of our *pasuk* presents another problem. The Torah tells us that "he (the Metzora) shall be brought to the Kohein. When the Kohein declares a person a Metzora, that person is sent out of the three

camps of the B'nei Yisrael. These camps were concentric areas spreading out from the first camp (that of the Mishkan and its courtyard), to the second camp (that of the tribe of Levi which included the Kohanim), and finally to the third camp (that of the rest of the B'nei Yisrael). The Metzora was not permitted to enter any of the camps of the B'nei Yisrael until he was declared purified by the Kohein. The very next pasuk in the Torah appears, at the same time, to answer our question yet contradict our pasuk: "The Kohein shall go forth to the outside of the camp; the Kohein shall look, and behold, the Tzaraat affliction has been healed from the Metzora."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin offers an explanation of this contradiction. When one is ill, he goes to see a doctor who prescribes the proper medication to cure that illness. When the medication works, one normally does not return to the doctor to decide whether he is well. He declares himself well and goes on with his life. The Metzora is not sent out of the camp because he is ill. He could have been isolated within the camp were this a medically contagious disease. He was sent out of the camp because he was "tamei, impure." He remains impure until the Kohein views him and declares that the affliction has left him. Therefore, while he does not go into the camp of the Kohein, the Kohein must be sent for to examine him. It is not that the Metzora is brought to the Kohein; it is that the Metzora must see the Kohein to evaluate his status. But this is not the end of his journey. Even though the impurity may have left his body, there is still an aura of impurity which surrounds him. He begins his ritual purification, and after several steps, he must return to his dwelling, but he must sit outside that dwelling for seven days, after which he begins the final stage of his purification.

The Kli Yakar expresses another contradiction found in our pasuk. The Torah speaks of a Metzora on the day of his purification, but if he has been purified, he is no longer a Metzora. And how can we speak of the day of his purification if he has not already been declared cured? The Kli Yakar explains that the name, Metzora, comes from the words "motzi ra, he spreads evil." All the evil that was hidden inside the person becomes revealed to the public by this illness. This is not an illness that one could find a way in Nature to cure it. When the Metzora comes to grips with this fact, he begins to understand that this illness was a punishment from Hashem that was meant to help him, not harm him. This realization should cause him to turn his heart from evil and return to the path of Hashem. Still, like an addict he must be cognizant of his addiction at all times. He is still a potential motzi ra, a spreader of evil. Even though he has temporarily been cured of his addiction, he will always be susceptible to that temptation. He must realize that the name, Metzora, still applies to him even though others may note his cure and not refer to him as a Metzora. Perhaps he was returned to sit outside his tent so that he will see others but will not give in to the

temptation to spread gossip.

Speaking lashon hara, gossip, is a particularly harmful trait. There is never one person who sins this sin alone, as the speaker must have someone who is also willing to listen. The speaker truly spreads the disease, for those who are willing to listen are also those who are willing to speak to others who will listen to them. The damage done to the person spoken about is no less than the damage done to the speaker and the listener. The long-term effects to everyone involved can be devastating. We must each look upon ourselves as possible carriers of this disease. With a virus that is potentially fatal, we would not hesitate to protect ourselves. May we each think of gossip as such a fatal disease. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**W**hen a woman conceives and gives birth to a son, she shall be impure..." (Vayikra 12:2) Though most of the Parsha speaks about the laws of the Metzora, one who becomes impure due a blemish on his body, it begins with a few lines about a woman becoming impure because of having a child, and the parsha is named for this small section.

The question is asked why we need the words, ki tazria – when she conceives. Let the Torah just say, "When a woman shall bear a son, she is impure for seven days, and on the eighth day he shall be circumcised." One answer is, we learn that these laws don't apply to a child born via Cesarean section. She will not become impure, and the child will not have a Bris on the eighth day if it falls on Shabbos.

However, we also learn, as R' Shimon states, that the woman becomes impure even if she births something that is dissolved and resembles seed. Though no child was born, she will become impure anyway. Why is this so?

The commentaries give us some understanding of the impurity attached to menstruation. There was potential for new life and holiness, but when conception does not take place, and the eggs are released in blood, impurity takes the place of this potential greatness.

This message would apply to the woman who conceives but does not deliver a child as well. Though she was not a new mother, not having given birth to a son, she did have something with potential, and when that potential was lost, it leaves a vacuum of holiness which the impurity fills.

Perhaps this is why the portion of Tazria is placed at the beginning of the laws of Metzora. Tzaraas was caused by several different character flaws, such as arrogance, stinginess, and speaking ill of others. The common thread is not recognizing the greatness in others, and viewing them with a jaundiced or negative eye.

By looking down on people, and not giving them

the proper due as abundant wellsprings of potential, a person may have put an end to some of that potential, and the resulting vacuum attracts the impurity which manifests itself in their bodies as tzaraas.

In fact, the Gemara in Bava Metzia (107b) quotes Rav as saying the “source of all sickness” is ayin ra’ah, an evil or negative eye. He says he went to a cemetery and “99 people there died of ayin ra’ah and only 1 of natural causes.” But what does this mean?

It is true that optimism and positivity have shown to be beneficial to people’s good health. Those who bear grudges and see things in a negative life tend to live shorter, and certainly less productive lives. It’s possible that that Rav was telling us that many of those in the graveyard put themselves there prematurely by their pessimistic view of the world. As it says in Tehillim, “Who is the man who desires life? One who loves days to see good.”

However, he could also have been saying that by denigrating others, we may convince them that they are lowly, and they will never try to be great. Those lives will be ended before they ever began – and that is worse than murder.

A man died and went up to Heaven. Upon his advent there, he was greeted by the angel in charge of new arrivals. “Do you have any questions?” asked the angel.

“Well,” said the man, “I have always been a military history buff. Tell me, who was the greatest general of all time?” “Ah, that’s easy, it’s that man right over there” replied the angel.

“That man? There must be some mistake. I knew him while he was alive and he was a common laborer,” said the incredulous newcomer. “That’s true,” replied the angel, “but he would have been the greatest general of all time – if he had become a general.” ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky

Edited by Dovid Hoffman

At the beginning of Parshas Tazria, the Torah says that after a woman gives birth to a male son, she is ritually impure for seven days. Then, following immersion in a mikva (a ritual bath), she returns to a state of ritual purity. On the eighth day, male sons are circumcised. The Talmud in Niddah (31b) provides a very interesting reason for performing the bris milah on the eighth day.

During the seven days of ritual impurity following the birth of a son, the mother is a niddah. In early generations, prior to subsequent rabbinic prohibitions which exist today, the husband and wife were finally allowed to fully be together by the eighth day.

The Gemara explains that the reason why we wait until the eighth day for the bris milah and the

accompanying celebration is that prior to this time, the happiness of the husband and wife are limited by the prohibition against intimately sharing their joy together. The lack of ability by husband and wife to celebrate fully might even dampen the spirits and restrict the enjoyment of the other guests. Therefore, the Torah established that milah be 'delayed' until the eighth day, so that everyone will be able to fully participate in the joyous occasion.

Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein zt"l (the Slobodka Rosh Yeshiva) points out that the Torah is expressing tremendous sensitivity for people's feelings. This passage essentially says that milah should really be performed sooner. The Torah has us wait until the eighth day to make sure that everyone who is present at the bris will be able to fully enjoy themselves.

The concept of sharing happy occasions and maximizing everyone's simcha is so basic to Torah ethics that it justifies 'postponing' milah until the eighth day.

Rav Moshe Mordechai pointed out a parallel to a minhag during the Yizkor prayer in memory of the dead, which we say four times a year -- on Yom Kippur, and at the end of the three major holidays (Pesach, Shavuot, and Shemini Atzeres following Sukkos). There is a virtually universal custom that when Yizkor is said, people whose parents are both still living leave the sanctuary during the recital. What is the reason for this custom?

Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein wrote that the reason for this custom is the very concept mentioned earlier. Yizkor is usually recited on Yom Tov. If reciting Yizkor is not exactly a joyous experience for the people whose parents are deceased, it can at least be a comforting experience to remember their loved ones on Yom Tov. But if the other people witness this and watch friends and relatives perhaps shedding tears for departed parents, that would affect and contradict their enjoyment of the Yom Tov. We are trying to avoid this. We try to provide the appropriate form of Simchas Yom Tov (happiness on the holiday) for everyone. ©2023 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

