

**Wembley Synagogue**

תְּזַרְיַע מְצָרָע

Insights from the commentators into the Sidrot of Tazria and Metzora

This week's sidrot deal with Tzara'at a skin condition often mistranslated as leprosy. Rabbi S R Hirsch in his commentary on Vayikra 13:59 says that the symptoms of tzara'at are totally different from leprosy or any other currently known skin disease. The word *Nega* thus does not refer to an ordinary disease but rather one Divinely sent – the afflicted person – the *metzora* has been "touched" by the finger of Hashem (Hirsch to Vayikra 13:2). It was a miraculous occurrence that punishes a person for their misdeeds and encourages them to repent and correct their ways. The *Chinuch* (Mitzvah 169) says that although the laws of tzara'at are applicable today, the symptoms of tzara'at do not occur because we are not at the spiritual level to receive these miraculous messages. Based on Bamidbar 12:10 tzara'at is assumed to be a punishment for lashon hara – evil speech.

וְהוּבָא אֶל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן - And he shall be brought to Aharon the *Kohen*." (13:2)

Why concerning tzara'at of the skin does it say וְהוּבָא - "*vehuva*" – "and he shall be brought" – while concerning the affliction of tzara'at on a house it says, "*uba asher lo habayit*" – "the one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the *Kohen*" (14:35)? The afflictions of tzara'at discussed in *Parshiot Tazria* and *Metzora* are not conventional diseases. *Tzara'at* is a Heavenly punishment for selfish behavior and gossip, one designed to help the afflicted person to repent and resolve to correct his ways. Although in the Torah the laws of bodily leprosy, are discussed first, Hashem is merciful and in actuality the person's house is afflicted first. Afterwards, if this does not help, his clothes are afflicted, and if the person still does not repent, then the person himself become afflicted with tzara'at (Rambam, *Tumat Tzara'at* 16:10). Usually, one whose home is stricken realises that he is receiving a sign from Heaven and, therefore, "*he comes to the Kohen*," who is the spiritual mentor of the people, seeking his advice and guidance. However, an actual *metzora* has already received two "reminders" from Hashem, and apparently he is stubborn in his ways and does not want to recognise the supremacy of Heaven or the authority of the *Kohen*; therefore, "*vehuva el haKohen*" – "*he shall be brought to the Kohen*" – by his friends and relatives. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הַמַּכּוּת...יִגַּע צָרְעַת הַזֶּה - The *Kohen* shall look at the mark...it is the mark of tzara'at (13:3). The Rabbis tell us in the Gemara Arachin 16a that tzara'at is a punishment for speaking *lashon hara* - gossip.

It is for this reason, commented Rabbi Yisrael Salanter that the Sidra that deals with tzara'at appears in the Torah following the Sidra of Shemini which deals with kashrut. The Torah teaches us that we should be just as careful about what we allow to come out of our mouths as we should be about what goes in.

וְיִקְרָא - And he shall cry out "unclean!" "Unclean!" (13:45)

When someone is punished with tzara'at he is required to call out וְיִקְרָא - as he walks through the camp on his way to where he must dwell alone. Surely calling out these words embarrasses him greatly. Why does the Torah command him to publicise his regrettable condition? The Gemara Shabbat 67a explains that the Torah wants people to feel pity for him. As the *metzora* leaves the camp and calls out these words, people hear his mournful cry and sympathy for him wells up in their hearts. They are moved to pray that Hashem will heal him quickly. As a rule, the Torah wants us to do everything in our power to avoid causing embarrassment to any fellow Jew. The Rabbis say (Gemara Sotah 10b) that "it is better for a man to throw himself into a furnace, and not embarrass his fellow!" Here, however, the Torah wants to cause the *metzora* embarrassment, so that people will pray for him. From the *metzora's* mitzvah to publicise his condition, the Rabbis saw how extremely important it is to daven for other people. The Torah would never have commanded this mitzvah unless davening for others is extremely important. The Torah wants us to be sensitive and concerned about the welfare of others. Even when things are going well for us, we must be keenly aware of the suffering of others. (Source: Parsha Pearls)

יָשֵׁב מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבוֹ - He shall remain isolated (13:46)

Why is the tzara'at sufferer isolated?

Rashi says so that other ritually impure people should not be with him. The Rabbis said "why is he different from other ritually impure people, that he must be isolated?" Since he caused a severance between a man and his wife or between man and his fellow with his gossip, he too, is severed (from society).

The Gemara Pesachim 67a says that he must be isolated so as not to contaminate the other people that are around him with ritual impurity.

Rambam says he will have to be isolated in public disgrace until he stops occupying himself with wicked speech, mockery and gossip.

Metzora

זֹאת תְּהִי־הַתּוֹרָה הַמְצַרֵּעַ - This shall be the law of the metzora. (14:2)

Why a person with tzara'at is called a "metzora"?

The Gemara (Arachin 15b) says that one of the ways to become a *metzora* is through speaking *lashon hara*. The word "metzora" is a combination of two words: "motzi ra" – "one who brings out evil" [about another person]. The punishment for this is *nega tzara'at* – plague of tzara'at.

The Torah prohibits *lashon hara* by commanding: לֹא תִלְוֶה בְּעַמֶּיךָ - "You shall not be a talebearer among your people" (19:16). These words have the numerical value of 883, the same as the numerical value of נֶגַע צָרַעַת - *nega tzara'at*. This shows that the sin and punishment are exactly *midah keneged midah* – measure for measure.

The *Midrash* relates that Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel sent his servant to the market and said, "Bring me the best thing you can find." The servant came back with a tongue. Another time, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said to his servant, "Go to the market and bring me the worst thing you can find." Again, the servant returned with a tongue. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel was startled and asked his servant, "How is it that you brought me a tongue as the best thing you could find, and again a tongue as the worst?" The servant replied, "There is nothing better than a tongue that speaks good and nothing worse than a tongue that speaks evil."

וְהוֹבִי־אֵל הַכֹּהֵן - He shall be brought to the Kohen (14:2)

The implication is that the metzora will be brought to the Kohen – against his will. Why does the Torah assume that this will be the case?

The Rabbis interpret מְצַרֵּעַ (metzora) as an acronym for מוֹצִיא שֵׁם רַע - one who slanders (Gemara Arachin 16a). Why does the Torah demand that the metzora be brought to the Kohen? The Dubno Maggid suggests that one reason that people are negligent about *lashon hara* is that they don't realise the forceful power of speech. The Torah therefore sends the metzora to the Kohen. The metzora's fate will now be decided by the Kohen whose word will make all the difference. The metzora will learn firsthand that "life and death are in the hands of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). The passuk indicates that the metzora is brought to the Kohen, while the next passuk states "The Kohen shall go forth outside of the camp" implying that 'the Kohen went out to see him in a dignified manner and without exertion' (Sforno). This teaches that one who seeks to become טָהוֹר - pure - must take the first step. Once he takes that first step, indicating that he wants to be purified, then the Kohen moves towards him to help him. And even if it means leaving his own comfortable environment to go outside the camp, the Kohen must be ready to go, for the sake of purifying his fellow Jew (Based on Shem Mishmuel quoted in the Torah Treasury)

וְגִלַּח אֶת כָּל שְׁעָרוֹ אֶת רֹאשׁוֹ וְאֶת זְקָנוֹ וְאֶת גְּבוֹת עֵינָיו - He shall shave all his hair off, his head, his beard and his eyebrows (14:9)

The three principal transgressions punished with tzara'at are haughtiness, evil gossip and an envious eye. Hence, in order to become clean again, a metzora must symbolically cleanse himself of these three sins. He must shave off the hair on his head because he was haughty and wanted to be "at the head" of everything. Next, he must shave off his beard because it failed to guard his mouth, which it surrounds, from uttering evil gossip. Finally, he must shave his eyebrows that failed to keep his eye from envy. (Source: Kli Yakar)

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 7.51pm



Shabbat ends: 8.58pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

Online at: http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html