



Wembley Synagogue

מִצְרַע

Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Metzora 5768

What's the Sidra about?

1st Aliya: The laws of purity and impurity as they pertain to childbirth are discussed. The basic laws of Tzara'at involving the diagnosis of the Kohen and possible quarantine, as well as the laws of Tzara'at as it relates to healthy skin and infection are stated. **2nd & 3rd Aliyot:** The laws of Tzara'at as it relates to burns, a bald patch, dull white spots, and the presence of a blemish on clothing is discussed. **4th Aliya:** The purification process of the Metzora involving two Kosher birds, a piece of cedar, some crimson wool, a hyssop branch, fresh spring water, a clay bowl, a Kohen, the Mikvah, seven days, a haircut and a Korban with its Mincha offering is detailed. **5th Aliya:** The Korban of a Metzora who is financially destitute poor is discussed. **6th & 7th Aliya:** The laws dealing with blemishes that appear on a house are detailed. Following the laws of Tzara'at, the Torah turns its attention to various laws dealing with bodily discharges that render the individual Tameh. (Source: R' Aron Tendler)

זאת תהיה תורת המצורע - This is the law of the metzora . . . (14:2) The Gemara ערכין 15b elaborates: "This is the law of the motzi shem ra /one who speaks evil of another." [The Gemara is reading the word "metzora" as an abbreviation of "motzi shem ra" in order to teach that tzara'at is a punishment for speaking lashon hara.] The Chafetz Chaim writes that one may transgress as many as 31 of the 613 commandments with one act of speaking lashon hara. A partial list of these includes: the prohibition on being a gossip; the commandment to avoid tzara'at; the prohibition on placing a stumbling block before another (because the one who speaks lashon hara causes others to listen to lashon hara, which also is a sin); the prohibition on forgetting G-d (because a person who speaks lashon hara thereby demonstrates haughtiness, whereas a person who remembers G-d is aware of his own faults and is never haughty); the two prohibitions on taking revenge and bearing a grudge; the prohibition on giving false testimony; the prohibition on following in Korach's footsteps (i.e., by bringing about hostility between people); and others. (Source: Sefer Chafetz Chaim: Introduction)

זאת תהיה תורת המצורע - This is the Torah of the tzara'at affliction (13:59) "This shall be the Torah of the metzora . . ." (14:2) "This is the Torah of one in whom there is a tzara'at . . ." (14:32) "This is the Torah for every tzara'at affliction . . ." (14:54) "This is the Torah of tzara'at." (14:57) Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi teaches in Midrash Rabbah: The word "Torah" appears five times in connection with the metzora / one who is afflicted with tzara'at. The word "metzora" alludes to "motzi shem ra" / one who gives another a bad name; indeed, tzara'at is a punishment for lashon hara. The five-time repetition of "Torah" teaches that one who speaks lashon hara transgresses all five books of the Torah. Therefore, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi concludes, Moshe Rabbeinu warned the Jewish people regarding the laws of tzara'at. What is the Midrash teaching? asks R' Moshe Gruenwald z"l . Didn't Moshe warn the Jewish people against all of the Torah's transgressions, even those that are not equal to violating all five books of the Torah?

He explains: An argument could be made that the laws of tzara'at should have been addressed to the kohanim. It is the kohanim, after all, who are delegated to "diagnose" tzara'at and to accept the offerings brought by the "recovered" metzora. Why, the Midrash wonders, did Moshe address these laws to all of the Jewish people, not just to the kohanim? Indeed, why were the laws of the metzora's offerings (chapter 14) not addressed by G-d to Aharon as were the laws that precede and follow them (chapters 13 and 15)? The answer, says the Midrash, is that Moshe was to make a special point to all of the Jewish people: speaking lashon hara is equivalent to violating all five books of the Torah. (Source: Arugat Habosem)

ועץ אדרו ושני תלעת ואוב - And wood of cedar and a red thread and hyssop" The Metzora (one afflicted with Tzora'at, a disease caused by spiritual deficiencies) underwent a special purification

process when his affliction disappeared. This process required cedar wood, a red thread and a stalk of hyssop grass. Rashi states that the purpose of bringing the hyssop grass was to remind the Metzora to be as humble as the lowly hyssop. Haughtiness is one of the main spiritual deficiencies which caused the Tzora'at. It is therefore appropriate that the Metzora be reminded of the importance of humility. One might think that such an important lesson would be discussed explicitly in the Torah. Instead, rather than giving the Metzora a directive to be humble, the Torah relies on the symbolism of the hyssop grass to convey this critical message. Why doesn't the Torah deal with the issue of humility directly? Learning to be humble is not a lesson that is easily absorbed. Developing humility requires much introspection. By nature, a person feels self-important because of their accomplishments. If we were told simply "Be humble" we would not be likely to accept such an admonition since this message is too foreign to our nature. A lesson that is antithetical to a person's nature if taught in an overt manner will be rejected automatically. Therefore the Torah chose to impress the importance of humility upon the Metzora in a subtle way - by commanding him to bring a lowly grass, the symbol of humility. (Source: Sfat Emet)

Why are the laws of lashon hara so difficult to observe? R' Moshe Rosenstein z"l (mashgiach of the Lomza Yeshiva) suggests that it is because the laws appear to many people to be illogical. After all, why is lashon hara viewed so severely? Why can't we speak negatively of another person if we are speaking the truth? R' Rosenstein offers several explanations: First, imagine that we were hired with a group of other individuals to weed a large field. Pulling up every single weed is back-breaking work, and there is no doubt that any of the workers, ourselves included, would do a perfect job. Would we criticise our fellow workers for not finishing their jobs when we have not finished ours either? Or, would we praise their incomplete jobs, knowing that we also look good if they are praised? [R' Rosenstein says that he does not need to explain the parable because its meaning is obvious. Simply put, to the extent that we overlook the faults of others, our own less than perfect characters and actions can be overlooked also. Conversely, if we focus on others' faults, then our faults will be highlighted as well.] In addition, writes R' Rosenstein, it is impossible not to exaggerate when describing the faults of another. Thus, even if one intends to tell only the truth, he is bound to tell a lie. Finally, one who sees a fault in another is required to rebuke him. Thus, one who speaks about another instead of to him is neglecting the mitzvah of giving rebuke. (Source: Ahavat Meisharim)

The Mishnah in Nega'im 2:5 states: **כָּל הַנְּעִים אָדָם רוּאָה חַיִּין מִנְּעֵי עַצְמוֹ** - A person may examine any nega'im (tzara'at wounds) except his own. Literally, this means that a person, even a kohen, may not be the judge of whether he himself has tzara'at. Rather, he must go to another kohen. Figuratively, however, this statement is frequently interpreted as referring to the fact that people are rarely objective about their own faults. A person sees everyone else's faults, but not his own. (Source: quoted in Hamaayan 5765)

וְהַקֹּהֵן הַכֹּהֵן הַמְּטַהֵר אֶת הָאִישׁ הַמְּטַהֵר וְאֹתָם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה פָּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד - And the Kohen who cleanses should stand the man who is being cleansed and them (the sacrificial animals) before Hashem by the opening of the sanctuary" A Metzora must undergo a purification process when the skin condition disappears. This involves bringing sacrifices and he/she must enter the Bet Hamikdash Temple area. Because the Metzora is still ritually unclean, the entry is done in a partial manner, something that is forbidden to any other individual who is ritually impure. The Metzora is accorded special treatment by the Torah because he is a Ba'al Teshuva (one who is repenting). This is evident by the fact that he was healed from his sin, which originally induced the Tzora'at. Hashem takes special care to expedite the repentance of a Ba'al Teshuva despite any obstacles that may arise. (Ma'ayana Shel Torah)

שבת שלום!

Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 7.36pm



Shabbat ends: 8.41pm

לע"נ ר' מרדכי צבי ב"ר חיאל משה וולפסון ז"ל

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

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