

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Tazria Metzora

Lessons from *Tzoraas*

זאת תהיה תורת המצורע ביום טהרתו

This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification (14:2)

The Parshiyos of Tazria and *Metzora* deal in the main with the punishment of *tzoraas* which can affect a person's house, clothing and body in response to various types of moral deficiency and wrongdoing. As we will see, there is much to be learned from the way the Torah prescribes that the *metzora* be dealt with, both with regards to his term of *tzoraas* itself as well as his recovery therefrom.

TZORAAS OF THE HOUSE...

As part of the purification process for a house which has been affected by *tzoraas*, the Torah states¹

וְלָקַח אֶת עֵץ הָאֶרֶז וְאֶת הָאֵזוֹב וְאֶת הַתּוֹלַעַת וְאֶת הַצִּפּוֹר הַחַי וְכָבַד אֹתָם בְּדָם הַצִּפּוֹר
הַשְּׁחוּטָה וּבַמַּיִם הַחַיִּים וְהָיָה אֵל הַבַּיִת לְשִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים

He shall take the cedar wood, the hyssop, the scarlet thread and the live bird and he shall dip them into the blood of the slaughtered bird and into the fresh water, and he shall sprinkle upon the house seven times.

Commenting on this requirement, the Toras Kohanim² states that the blood must be sprinkled specifically on the lintel of the house's front door. What is behind this specific choice of location for the sprinkling of the blood?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that the principle in play here is that of *midah keneged midah* – measure for measure. The idea behind this principle is that if the *metzora* is to fully and meaningfully recover from his *tzoraas*, the underlying causes of his condition need to be recognized and addressed. Hence, the experience of *tzoraas* contains not only a punishment, but also a message.

¹ Vayikra 4:51.

² 5:14.

What is the cause for *tzoraas* of a house?

The Gemara³ identifies the answer to this question as being alluded to in an earlier pasuk in this perek,⁴ which describes the procedure upon the person first noticing a discoloration in the walls of his house:

וּבֵּא אִשָּׁר לּוֹ הַבַּיִת וְהִגִּיד לְכֹהֵן לְאמֹר כִּנְנַע נִרְאָה לִי בַבַּיִת

The one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the kohen, "The likeness of an affliction has appeared to me in the house"

The words "אִשָּׁר לּוֹ הַבַּיִת – to whom the house belongs" which are seemingly redundant, indicate that the cause for this type of *tzoraas* is the fact that the person wishes to keep the house and all that is in it to himself, and not to share any of his assets with others. *Tzoraas* on a house comes as a result of *tzarus ayin* – miserliness.

Therefore, the blood which comes to purify the house is sprinkled specifically on the lintel – the entrance to the house, for the affliction came about as result of the person refusing anyone else entry into his house.

...AND THE PERSON

Taking this discussion further, the Meshech Chochmah notes that when the Gemara elsewhere⁵ lists miserliness as one of the primary causes of *tzoraas*, it seems to imply that this is also true not only for *tzoraas* of the house, but also *tzoraas* of the body!⁶ How does *tzoraas* of the body relate to the issue of miserliness?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that one of the symptoms of the trait of miserliness is that it sets a person apart from others. When a person refuses to avail others of his possessions, he is effectively thereby setting up a barrier between himself and them. Indeed, the halachah states that if a husband refuses to allow his wife to lend any household items to their neighbors, she can sue for divorce, as he is effectively cutting her off from her surroundings!⁷

3 *Yoma 11b.*

4 Pasuk 35.

5 *Arachin 16b.*

6 This is in addition to the well-known idea, noted by the Meshech Chochmah earlier in this section, that *tzoraas of the body comes as a punishment for speaking lashon hara (slander)*. In this regard, Meshech Chochmah explains that blood is sprinkled on the metzora's hand (see *Toras Kohanim to Vayikra 14:7*) in order to reflect the Gemara's teaching (see *Kesubos 5b*) that if one hears others speaking *lashon hara* he should place his fingers in his ears to prevent himself from hearing it. The Meshech Chochmah concludes that paragraph by saying: "And any man of heart should listen carefully to the pleasant words of mussar at the conclusion of the Rambam's treatment of these laws (*Hilchos Tumas Tzoraas 16:10*), and then all will be well with him."

7 See *Kesubos 72a.*

One of the Torah's requirements for one who has contracted *tzoraas* is that he be sent outside the city, as the pasuk states:⁸

בְּדָד יֵשֵׁב מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבוֹ

He shall dwell alone, his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

According to the halachah, the isolation required of the *metzora* is such that he cannot even dwell together with other *metzoraim* who were also sent outside the city! This total isolation is enforced upon him in order to bring him to reconsider whether he wishes – through his miserliness – to continue effectively isolating himself from others even as he dwells among them.

UNDERSTANDING A HALACHIC ANOMALY

The Meshech Chochmah proceeds to note, in his unique way, that appreciating this background to *tzoraas* will help shed light on one of its distinctive halachos. The three *korbanos* that the *metzora* brings upon his recovery are in the category of “*oleh ve’yored*,” that is to say, they vary depending on the person's financial status:

If he is of sufficient financial means, he brings three sheep, one for each of the *korbanos*. If he cannot afford this, he brings one sheep (asham) and two birds (chatas and olah).

What would happen if a person could afford to bring three animals, but nonetheless brought the *korbanos* of one who could not, i.e., a sheep and two birds? Has he fulfilled his obligation *bedieved* (after the fact) with *korbanos* brought from a bracket that is beneath his?

Interestingly, the Gemara⁹ states that whereas in all other situations of “*oleh ve’yored*,” a person of means who brought the less expensive *korban* would in fact fulfill his obligation. However, when it comes to the *korbanos* of a *metzora*, he does not fulfill his obligation even after the fact! The Gemara derives this ruling from the way in which the Torah introduces the purification process of the *metzora*:¹⁰

זֹאת תִּהְיֶה תּוֹרַת הַמְּצֹרָע בְּיוֹם טְהֻרָתוֹ

This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification

The word “זאת – this” is understood as insisting that the purification take place in exactly the way the Torah prescribes, with no other way being acceptable.

Having noted the scriptural basis for this exceptional ruling, the Meshech Chochmah proceeds to ask: What is *behind it*? Why should the *korbanos* of the *metzora* be different from all others in this respect?

8 13:46.

9 *Yoma 41b*.

10 14:2

Once we appreciate the background to these *korbanos*, namely, the recovery of the *metzora* from confronting the consequences of his miserliness, we will understand why one who can afford to bring three sheep but chooses instead to opt for the less expensive option does not fulfill his obligation; for he is effectively perpetuating his problem even as he is engaging in its solution! *Korbanos* which come to address the negative trait of miserliness cannot themselves be the product of that trait.¹¹

Thus, we see the *halachic details* which pertain to the *korbanos* of the *metzora* underscoring and reinforcing the *ethical message* which the Torah wishes to communicate to him regarding his becoming a *metzora* in the first place.

This week's Divrei Torah are dedicated le'ilui nishmas

DORIS COPPERMAN

דבורה גיטל בת מנחם מניס הכהן

¹¹ Based on Meshech Chochmah to 14:51. See there for additional suggestions for how to explain this exceptional halachah.