

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Metzora

The Metzora's Chatas – A Unique Korban

וַעֲשֶׂה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הַחֲטָאת וְכִפֶּר עַל הַמְטַהֵר מִטְּמֵאתוֹ

The Kohen shall perform the sin-offering service, and atone for the person being purified from his impurity (14:19)

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

The final phrase of our pasuk – “for the person being purified from his impurity” – seems somewhat repetitive; after all, purity is the opposite of impurity, so that when one is “being purified,” *by definition* it is “from his impurity”! Why, then, does the pasuk need to state this explicitly?

Indeed, later on in the perek, when the Torah describes the korbanos of a *metzora* who cannot afford to bring animals and brings birds instead, the pasuk¹ states simply “וְכִפֶּר הַכֹּהֵן עַל הַמְטַהֵר – the Kohen shall atone for the person being purified,” without adding “from his impurity.” Why, then, does our pasuk deem it necessary to mention it? Are not the poor and rich *metzora* purified from exactly the same state, and to exactly the same degree?

NESACHIM FOR A CHATAS? THE RULE AND THE EXCEPTION

The background to the Meshech Chochmah’s answer to this nuance lies in a unique aspect of the *metzora’s* korban. As a rule, a *chatas* (sin-offering) is not accompanied by *nesachim* (wine libations), as these are considered “enhancements” for a korban and are not appropriate for a korban that is coming to atone for a sin. The exception to this rule is the *chatas* of the *metzora*, which is accompanied by *nesachim*.² The Gemara³ explains that the reason for this exception is that the *metzora’s chatas* does not in fact come

1 Pasuk 31.

2 See Menachos 90b and Rashi to Vayikra 14:10.

3 Sotah 15a.

to atone for his sin; for even though his *tzoraas* came on account of wrongdoing,⁴ his atonement for his sin has already been achieved through the experience itself of having *tzoraas* and being quarantined outside the city. Rather, the sole purpose of his *chatas* is to complete his process of purification, removing him from a state of ritual impurity (*tumah*) and allowing him to partake of sanctified food, such as *korbanos*;⁵ therefore, it is fitting to be accompanied by *nesachim*.

Two Kinds of Purity

The concept of “purity” is mentioned in the Torah in two capacities:

- ▶ Purity from *tumah*.
- ▶ Purity from sin.⁶

Indeed, the beginning of our perek,⁷ which discusses the procedure involving the two birds, hyssop and cedar wood etc., already refers to the *metzora* as “מטהר מן הצרעת” – being purified from *tzoraas*.” This is true even though he is still *tamei* afterwards! Why, then, does the Torah refer to him as “being purified”? Rather, since that procedure completes his atonement from the condition of *tzoraas*, he is already being “purified” from his sin which brought that condition upon him.

Therefore, when the *metzora* subsequently comes to bring his *korbanos*, he is only in need of purification from his state of *tumah*. This is what our pasuk emphasizes by referring to him as “the one being purified from his impurity” – i.e., and not from his sin. The reason this is emphasized in our pasuk is because it is describing his *korbanos* which are all, unusually, accompanied by *nesachim* – including the *chatas*! The background to this exceptional situation is thus provided by the end of the pasuk: this *chatas* comes to purify him only from his impurity, not from sin, and hence, *nesachim* are entirely in place.

Animals and Birds

Moreover, this explains why the later pasuk in our perek, mentioned above, which mentions the *metzora* who cannot afford animals for his *korbanos*, simply calls him “the person being purified,” and does not add the words: “from his impurity.” Although it is likewise true for a poor *metzora* that he is being purified only from *tumah*, this does not need to be emphasized regarding his *korbanos*. *Nesachim* only ever accompany *korbanos* brought from animals, not from birds. Therefore, since the poor *metzora*’s *korbanos* are all birds, no accompanying *nesachim* are brought in any event, and hence there is nothing which distinguishes them from any other *chatas* bird offerings! As such, the Torah does not need to emphasize that this *chatas* comes only to purify him “from his impurity,” and therefore refers to him simply as “המטהר – the person being purified.”

4 E.g. speaking *Lashon Hara*.

5 In this respect, his *chatas* resembles that of a *zav* and *zavah* (discussed in perek 15 of our *Parsha*), whose conditions do not come as a result of sin at all and who require no atonement, but nevertheless are required to bring a *chatas* to allow them to partake of sanctified food.

6 As the pasuk states, for example, with regards to the atonement of Yom Kippur (Vayikra 16:30), “לפני ה' תטהרו” – before Hashem you shall be purified.”

7 Pasuk 7.

From the Haftarah: The Gates of Shomron

וארבעה אנשים היו מצורעים פתח השער

And four men were metzora'im at the entrance to the city gate (Melachim II, 7:3)

In the haftarah to our *parsha* we read about the four *metzora'im* who were outside the city of Shomron, and in whose lot it fell to inform those inside the city that the besieging troops of Aram had fled, and that the city was free.⁸ The background to the Meshech Chochmah's comment on how our pasuk describes these men lies in a question that was addressed to R' Akiva Eiger.

The basis of their expulsion from the city is presumably the halachah which states that a *metzora* must be sent "outside of the Camp".⁹ However, the Mishnah in Masechet Keilim¹⁰ states that this is only true regarding "walled cities," which the Bartenura¹¹ explains as referring to cities that were walled from the days of Yehoshua bin Nun. The city these *metzora'im* were sent out of was Shomron, in the north of Israel. However, it is apparent that Shomron was *not* walled from the days of Yehoshua, since the pasuk¹² describes Omri, King of Israel,¹³ purchasing a mountain from someone called Shemer and building the city of Shomron on it, all of this many years after the time of Yehoshua. Hence, the question is: Why were these men sent outside a city from which there was in fact no such requirement?¹⁴

Without mentioning this difficulty explicitly, The Meshech Chochmah addresses it with one line:

For the Kingdom of Israel treated Shomron as per the kedushah of Yerushalayim.

With these words, Meshech Chochmah is making a stunning statement. In reality, for the reason outlined above, there was no requirement to evict these four men from the city. However, having seceded from the kingdom of Yehuda in the South, the Northern Kingdom of Israel sought to establish itself as its equivalent *in every way*. This included bestowing on their capital city, Shomron all the laws of that pertained to the capital of the Southern Kingdom – Yerushalayim. In other words, the background to these four men being evicted from Shomron was not one of halachic requirement, but of political principle: "If they evict their *metzoraim* – then we evict ours!"

8 The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (107b) identifies these *metzoraim* as Gechazi and his three sons. The *tzoraas* with which they were afflicted was a punishment from the *Navi* Elisha for telling the Assyrian general, Na'man, that Elisha was prepared to receive gifts for having healed him (Na'aman) from his *tzoraas*, as detailed in *Melachim II, perek 5*.

9 Vayikra 13:46.

10 1:7.

11 Commentary to Keilim *ibid*.

12 Melachim I, 16:24.

13 I.e., of the ten tribes in the north of Israel, as opposed to the Kingdom of Yehuda in the south.

14 See Tosafos R' Akiva Eiger to Keilim *loc. cit*.

Indeed, the matter goes further, for the pasuk specifically states that these four men were sitting “at the entrance to the city gate.” What is the significance of this precise location?

The Gemara¹⁵ states that although the walls of Yerushalayim also enjoyed the sanctity of the city itself, the gates of the city were deliberately left unsanctified at the outset in order to allow *metzoraim* who had been sent out of the city to seek shelter there. This detail, too, was mimicked by Shomron who, while they evicted their *metzoraim*, nonetheless allowed them to find shelter at the gates of the city, which they had likewise never “sanctified”.

And thus, although the entire simulation of Shomron to Yerushalyim was based on a fiction, we see that it was reproduced faithfully and down to the last detail.

15 Pesachim 85b.