

Parsha Ponders

Tazria / Metzora | April 16, 2021 | 4 Iyar 5781

The difference between a Metzora and a Kohen¹

אדם וגו' והיה בעור-בשרו לנגע צרעת והובא אל-אהרן הכהן או אל-אחד מבניו הכהנים: ויצא הכהן אל-מחויץ למחנה וראה הכהן והנה נרפא נגע-הצרעת מן-הצרוע

When a person...develops a *tzara'as* affliction on their skin, he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons, the Kohanim... The Kohen shall go outside the camp and he shall see, and behold! The afflicted person's *tzara'as* affliction has healed!²

This week's double *parsha* mostly deals with the laws of *tzara'as*, most commonly translated as leprosy. While being a whitish skin condition, in reality it's a totally unrelated spiritual malady³ with physical symptoms. *Chazal* tell us⁴ that someone who contracts *tzara'as*, known as a *Metzora*⁵, usually committed a certain sin⁶. One example is that of *loshon hara*, evil speech. As a result of his sin, he is infected with a disturbing skin condition, and has to have his status established by a Kohen. If the Kohen determines he is spiritually pure, then he is. The opposite is also true.

We find an interesting inconsistency with this topic. At first, before this guy is diagnosed, the Torah says that the person with the skin affliction should be brought to the Kohen⁷. However, in the second *parsha*, dealing with his purification, it says that the Kohen shall go to him. Why is it that before he is diagnosed, he has to go to the Kohen, but to confirm he is healed the Kohen has to go to the *Metzora*?

After the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Hashem made cloaks from hides for Adam and his wife⁸, referred to as כתונות עור. Interestingly, the Targum⁹ translates this as לבושי דיקר, clothes of honour. Meaning, the hides, עור, were purified so much until they became the homonym אור, meaning light. They were given clothes of light. Even more fascinating, is we find the Targum also translates¹⁰ the holy clothing of the Kohanim as לבושי דיקר. What can we learn from this phenomenon¹¹?

Now, how should we look at this sinner who spoke *loshon hara*? Not only did he fail to purify his "cloaks of hides" into "clothes of light", but he even damaged and afflicted his very own skin. He spoke *loshon hara* and developed *tzara'as*. As such, it's only fitting that he should go to the Kohen, and not vice-versa. His visit should serve as a rebuke to himself. Look how far apart these two are. This person scorned his

¹ Based on *Chasam Sofer's* *Toras Moshe* I to *Leviticus* 13:2

² *Leviticus loc. cit.* and 14:3

³ See *Mishneh Torah Hilchos Tumas Tzara'as* 16:10

⁴ *Arachin* 16; *Vayikra Rabbah* 16:1

⁵ מצורע, a contraction of רע שם, someone who causes a bad name (*Arachin* 15b)

⁶ Besides *loshon hara*, the consensus is that murder and haughtiness cause *tzara'as* (*ibid*). *Arachin* 16a adds oaths in vain, illicit relations, theft and stinginess to the list, whereas *Vayikra Rabbah loc. cit.* cites lying, thinking about sins, running to do sins, and giving false testimony (citing *Proverbs* 6:17-19 as the source)

⁷ Besides the above verse, it also says this in *ibid* 14:2. However, that second time is referring to when the person has already been declared a *Metzora*. They have to be brought to the Kohen to become purified. Interestingly, the *Da'as Zekeinim ad loc.* point out that since the *Metzora* has to be separated from society, there's no one who can bring him. Therefore, the term והובא there is to be read בא והוא, and he'll come (on his own)

⁸ *Genesis* 3:21

⁹ *Ad. loc.*

¹⁰ See *Targum Onkelos* to *Exodus* 28:2

¹¹ The *Chasam Sofer* cites this insight into the Targum from *Shenei Luchos HaBris Torah Sh'B'Kesav parshas Tazria – Metzora Torah Ohr* § 3

skin and contaminated himself, whereas Aharon elevated himself. He started off as a regular person who became so holy and sanctified until he earned the “clothes of honor” of the Kohanim. Even though after Aharon passed away the *Metzora* would be only traveling to one of his descendants, still, the Kohanim managed to retain their lofty level and not ruin it. Therefore, when this guy becomes afflicted, it makes sense for him to go to the Kohanim.

Eventually, his affliction will heal due to his repentance. The Torah says that **מִן הַצְרוּעַ** נגע הצרעת, the *tzara'as* affliction will be healed **from the Metzora**. What is this latter part adding? After introspecting about his failures and committing to improve, he's a different person. It's coming to teach us that the *Metzora* himself is healed, not just his skin. Due to his repentance, our Sages tell us¹² that all of his sins are now considered merits. He is now greater than a righteous person who never sinned¹³. Now, all he needs is the Kohen to affirm his purification. This time however, the Kohen is to go to the *Metzora*. The Kohen, who is only a regular righteous person, needs to learn a lesson from this *Metzora* who repented. Now that he is healed, he is greater than the Kohen. This unbelievable sight should inspire the Kohen to even greater heights. His journey to perfection could inspire us all.

Good Shabbos

¹² Yoma 86b, assuming he repented out of love

¹³ במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדים אין צדיקים גמורים יכולים לעמוד (Berachos 34b). The Chasam Sofer seems to be saying the reason for this is because the *ba'al teshuvah's* sins became merits, which the righteous person can never acquire. He's not the only one who makes this connection. It's also made by the Chida in his Kisei Dovid Derush LeShabbos Shuvah § 13 s.v. מזה נמשך and Devarim Achadim Derush LeShabbos HaGadol § 14 s.v. אך לטעם, המפרשים, as well as the Dubna Maggid in his Kochav Ya'akov Haftaras VaEschanan to Isaiah 40:2