

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Tazria

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חיליני

SHABBOS STRENGTH

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman

"And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." (12:3)

The Ohr HaChaim quotes Chazal (Devarim Rabbah, chapter 6) to explain why the eighth day was chosen for this mitzvah: "Hashem had mercy upon him [the baby], waiting until he had strength, just as He had mercy upon animals, forbidding their being offered as a sacrifice until they are a minimum of eight days old."

What is the secret of this strength that enters exactly on the eighth day? It is surely, as the Zohar says, that a Holy Shabbos day shall pass over him, giving him the spiritual soul that is empowered on the Shabbos day. Indeed, we find that "until Shabbos came, the universe was unstable and trembling, but when Shabbos arrived it gained strength and rested" (Bereishis Rabbah, chapter 10). This is also the strength of the newborn baby.

PERFECTLY IMPERFECT

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." (12:3)

Why was man created with a foreskin that must be removed through circumcision? Does this mean that G-d created an imperfect being? The answer is that everything in this world requires rectification. Wheat needs to be ground... (Bereishis Rabbah 11:6)

But couldn't G-d have created everything perfect, without the need for rectification?

G-d created the world with the intention that we would earn our own reward for the Future. To accomplish this, we must have free will, the ability to choose between right and wrong, good and evil. When we choose good, we reveal the G-dliness that is in this world. Therefore, we will always encounter imperfect things and imperfect situations. Our mission is to rectify them, to bring them to as close a state of perfection as we can.

Seven days represent the concept of time as we know it, the weekly cycle. The eighth day represents Binah, the World to Come, the concept of beyond time. Waiting seven days and making the milah on the eighth day signifies the elevation of this world to the level beyond it, to that of the World to Come. And we hope that these intentions will influence the infant to strive for the higher levels. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 742)

LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"She may not touch anything holy, and she may not enter the Beis HaMikdash until the completion of her days of purity." (12:4)

The Noam Elimelech highlights a powerful lesson through his interpretation of this pasuk. As we know, once the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, we became responsible to construct a mini Beis HaMikdash within ourselves. We must refine our conduct and behavior in order to ensure that Hashem is comfortable dwelling within us. However, a person is not capable of creating a space worthy for Hashem to reside in without expending significant energy over a long period of time, with an emphasis on filling one's life with sanctity and purity.

This is what the Torah means when it states: V'el ha'mikdash lo savoh ad m'los yemei taharah; one cannot create a mini mikdash for Hashem to dwell in until one exerts a great deal of effort over many days focused on spiritual growth.

We live in a world today where we expect immediate results. Our society promotes and demands instant gratification. The Noam Elimelech is teaching us that a person cannot simply wake up one morning and expect that Hashem will dwell within him or her. Avodas Hashem requires hard work, over an extended period, that cannot just be achieved within a short span of time. With this in mind, let us put our best foot forward and plug away so that we can ensure that Hashem dwells within us.

EAGER TO REDEEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When the period of her purification has been completed, whether for a son or a daughter, she must bring a sheep in its first year as an ascent-offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin-offering to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, to the kohen.” (12:6)

The Torah encourages the new mother, once she has regained her ritual purity, to offer up the appropriate sacrifices in the Temple at the earliest permissible opportunity.

The sages teach us that G-d fulfills all the commandments He obligates us to perform. Thus, if He urges the new mother to complete her purification process at the earliest opportunity, not to spend even one extra moment deprived of the opportunity to enter the Temple and partake of its holiness, it follows that He is equally eager to redeem us from our exile so we may join Him, so to speak, both in the rebuilt Temple and in our spiritually elevated lives, which will also become His “Temple” with the advent of the Messianic Era. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, pp. 85-87) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

LET THE LIGHT IN

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“If a person [adam] will have on the skin a s'eis, or a sapachas, or a baheres (swelling, rising, bright spot)...” (13:2)

The Torah in Parshas Tazria introduces the subject of tzaraas by speaking of an אדם, a person, who has a discoloration on עור בשרו - the skin of his flesh.” The Sefas Emes finds it significant that the Torah refers to the individual here specifically with the term אדם, and that it specifies that the affliction appears not simply on בשרו, the person’s flesh, but on עור בשרו - the skin of his flesh.” This pasuk, the Sefas Emes explains, brings us back to the story of Adam HaRishon, of his banishment from Gan Eden. After he and Chava partook of the forbidden fruit, they suddenly felt ashamed by not wearing clothing, and so G-d made for them עור כתנות, leather garments, for them to wear (Bereishis 3:21). The word עור, the Sefas Emes writes, is related to the word “עור - blind.” The garments made for Adam and Chava after their sin signifies the state of “blindness” in which human beings live ever since that tragic event. Before Adam and Chava’s sin, there was a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong, between what is good for us and what isn’t. Temptation existed externally, as represented by the snake, a different creature that lured man to sin. Internally, however, Adam and Chava lived with clarity. After the sin, we live with עור כתנות, with “coverings” that “blind” us. We now struggle to see the difference between right and wrong; temptation makes sin and vice seem attractive and alluring, blinding us to their evil.

However, the Sefas Emes writes, these עור כתנות, this covering, is porous. There are small holes through which light can enter to give us clarity, to resolve the confusion, to show us what is right and what is wrong. Even in our condition of “blindness,” the darkness is not complete. We have sources of light, of guidance, that clarify for us what is right and what is wrong. The Torah here warns that a נגע, a spiritual affliction, occurs when it seals עור בשרו, blocking the “perforations” in the “covering” that allow the light to enter. A person is plagued when the holes are sealed, when the “blindness” becomes complete, and he can no longer distinguish between right and wrong.

The takeaway from this deep insight of the Sefas Emes is that we must always ensure to keep the “perforations” open, to allow the light of clarity and truth into our lives. Ever since Adam and Chava’s sin in Gan Eden, we live in darkness, in confusion, blinded by temptation. This is the struggle which every person must go through each day of his life. In order to successfully wage this battle, we need to allow the light in, to remain open to receiving guidance and instruction. We need to learn and to expose ourselves to those who can instruct us and show us where we need to go. If we close ourselves off to guidance, if we do not pursue knowledge or inspiration, then we thrust ourselves into total darkness, we become completely “blinded,” and will then, G-d forbid, experience נגעים, spiritual maladies, which can be very difficult to cure.

NOBODY IS IMMUNE

Izbitzer Rebbe

“If a person [adam] will have on the skin a s'eis, or a sapachas, or a baheres (swelling, rising, bright spot), he shall be brought to Aharon the kohen, or to one of his sons, the kohanim.” (13:2)

In Hebrew the human being is called by four names: ish, gever, enosh, and adam. According to the Zohar, the term adam is the highest level.

Since the disease is a punishment for speaking evil, it appears that speaking evil is prevalent even among the highest level of human being.

A TRUE MAN

Rabbi Nissan Alpert

“If a person [adam] will have on the skin a s'eis, or a sapachas, or a baheres (swelling, rising, bright spot), he shall be brought to Aharon the kohen, or to one of his sons, the kohanim.” (13:2)

It takes a great person - an “adam” - to admit his shortcomings and appear in front of the kohen to be examined for leprosy. One does not lose the appellation “adam” by sinning, for no one is perfect. On the contrary, by not seeking to correct his shortcomings, one loses this title.

MAN'S OBSTACLES

Degel Machaneh Ephraim

"If a person [adam] will have on the skin a s'eis, or a sapachas, or a baheres (swelling, rising, bright spot), he shall be brought to Aharon the kohen, or to one of his sons, the kohanim." (13:2)

There are many obstacles that can occur in life - even in the category of "adam," the highest designation of human qualities.

The three obstacles are "swelling" (s'eis) - uncalled-for arrogance; "rising" (sapachas) - befriending evil people and pursuing the accumulation of wealth; and a "bright spot" (baheres) - strange thoughts, or trying to understand logically theories that are contrary to ways of Hashem.

RETURNING THROUGH REJOICING

Avnei Ezel

"If a person [adam] will have on the skin a s'eis, or a sapachas, or a baheres (swelling, rising, bright spot), he shall be brought to Aharon the kohen, or to one of his sons, the kohanim." (13:2)

When Bnei Yisrael heard the Torah portion dealing with the plague of tzaraas, they became afraid. Moshe calmed them, saying: "Don't be afraid. Other nations of the world may be afraid, but you should eat and drink and rejoice, for it is written: Many harm the wicked but one who trusts in G-d will be surrounded by loving-kindness." (Midrash Rabbah)

There are two ways in which we can be made to realize that there is a G-d and that we should direct our thoughts to repentance and to higher things of the spirit. Plagues and suffering remind us that there is a Supreme Being Who demands strict accounting for all our deeds and to Whom we must therefore return in repentance.

The other way is through Divine grace, which enlightens us and allows us to perceive the deeper meaning of our purpose. Such enlightenment from above most frequently comes during the holy seasons, on Shabbosim and on the festivals, the mikroei kodesh, "holy convocations," as the Torah calls them, which summon us to commune with ourselves and draw nearer to sanctity.

Evil and heathen nations don't have the benefit of the joy and holiness of Shabbosim and festivals. Therefore, if G-d has compassion on them and desires to stir them to repentance, their awakening can be brought about only through plagues and suffering like tzaraas. Hence, they have reason to be afraid.

But Jews, who are willing to observe the Torah and rejoice in keeping Shabbosim and festivals, will receive the same summons - not through suffering - but through loving-kindness, through the "eating, drinking and rejoicing" with which they will celebrate their holy seasons.

POWER OF TEHILLIM

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"...he shall be brought to Aharon the kohen, or to one of his sons, the kohanim." (13:2)

The mishnah in Masseches Negaim (3:1) derives from the above pasuk that in fact any person can determine the status of a plague found on a person's body. However, only a kohen from the family of Aharon has the right to declare if one is tahor or tamei. Either the kohen is told to say tamei and he says tamei, or he is told to say tahor and he says tahor.

We find that even if a kohen is a true ignoramus and has no idea what a pure or impure patch of skin looks like, he must be the one to utter the words "tahor" or "tamei," even if a non-kohen who is a talmid chacham is telling him what to say. In this regard, intent is less important than the person upon whom the mantle of priesthood is bestowed.

In this vein, the Tolna Rebbe, Rav Dovid Twerski zt'l, writes a remarkable thing. The midrash in the beginning of Tehillim relates that when Dovid Hamelech composed the pesukim of Tehillim, he prayed to Hashem that whoever will occupy himself by reciting the words of Tehillim, should be considered as if he is occupying himself in the laws of nega'im (plagues) and ohalos (tents) (Midrash Shocheh Tov 1). What does this mean? What is the connection between the holy words of Tehillim and negaim? Explains the Tolna Rebbe, the purpose of Tehillim is for people to recite it and take comfort in its words. However, most people, especially if they are experiencing trying and difficult times, cannot focus on the meaning of the words nor understand their deep and significant undertones. They say the pesukim and pray for Divine salvation.

This was Dovid's intent when he asked that saying Tehillim should be akin to learning the laws of nega'im. For just as an ignorant kohen, who has no understanding of the laws of purity, can say the words "tahor" or "tamei" to effect the status of a plague, a simple Jew's recital of the words of Tehillim should be enough to draw down Divine salvation.

SUBTLE SLIPS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If a person [adam] will have on the skin a s'eis, or a sapachas, or a baheres (swelling, rising, bright spot), he shall be brought to Aharon the kohen, or to one of his sons, the kohanim." (13:2)

The first types of tzaraas that the Torah discusses are those that appear on a person's skin. The skin is the external layer of our body; this type of tzaraas therefore alludes to an imperfection in our external behavior. Specifically, it afflicts people who are guilty of unintentional, spontaneous injurious gossip or slander.

We can indeed purify our deliberate behavior, speech, and thought of negativity. Nevertheless, some subconscious negativity might remain, lurking so deep within that we might never become aware of it on our own. When the only trace of negativity remaining within us is this delicate, the only way it can surface is in spontaneous behavior, such as unpremeditated gossip - the casual remark that slips through otherwise innocent conversation. Spontaneous speech discloses the inner recesses of the heart.

When the Tabernacle or Temple stood, G-d let people know when they still possessed this slight imperfection of character by afflicting them with tzaraas. Although we lack this open sign today, We can still notice the slips of our tongue and take them as cues to refine ourselves accordingly. (Likutei Torah 2:22b; Likutei Sichot, vol. 22, pp. 65-69, 74-75) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SPIRITUAL PORES

Sefas Emes

"If a person [adam] will have on the skin a s'eis, or a sapachas, or a baheres (swelling, rising, bright spot), he shall be brought to Aharon the kohen, or to one of his sons, the kohanim." (13:2)

At the time of Creation, the Divine Presence shone throughout the natural world. Man was surrounded with such holiness that he was able to feel and understand the spiritual life. The strength of evil was overpowered by G-dly power.

After the sin of man, the Divine Presence became hidden. The world became polluted with evil and true inner Divinity was hidden from man. That is why the pasuk states: "And Hashem made for Adam and his wife a coat of skin" (Bereishis 3:21).

Everything was covered with clothing of skin; however, just as the skin has pores, so too does the covering in nature have a slit for the Divine supervision to be seen, so that it will shine through to give light to the world.

When we see only the affliction, then we must go to the Spiritual Leader to pierce the heavenly skin. Therefore, the pasuk states that when there was an affliction of the skin, the Kohen was to see how deep the affliction was.

PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT

Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

"...and the kohen shall examine the affliction on the skin of the body..." (13:3)

People notice any plague except that on themselves and even except the one on their relatives. (Mishnah Negaim 2:45)

We can immediately see others' faults, but not our own faults, and we notice strangers' faults more readily than our relatives' faults.

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Ben Ish Chai

"...and the kohen shall examine the affliction on the skin of the body..." (13:3)

The difference between the words "נגע" (affliction) and "ענג" (pleasure) is the location of the "ע". This is what is meant by the pasuk: "Chacham einav b'rosho - a wise man has his eyes (his 'ayin') in his front." Meaning, he places the "ע" in front, thus changing נגע into ענג.

Thus, when the kohen comes to check on a man's affliction and sees that the affliction has not changed its color, he sees, "lo hafach eino," that the "ayin" has remained at the end of the word and the person has not cured his habits, then he will declare it impure.

CONSIDER THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk

"...and the kohen shall examine the affliction on the skin of the body... the Kohen shall look at it and make him impure." (13:3)

If the affliction which was considered impure occurred on a holiday, the person was set free. The reason is that the afflicted should participate in a joyous occasion.

Therefore, the words "the Kohen will look" is mentioned twice. First, the Kohen should look at the affliction, and then he should consider the situation in which the person finds himself. This teaches us that there should be concern for the person with the affliction, as well as the circumstances at the time.

HEALING ALL WOUNDS

Rebbe Nachman

"...and its hair did not turn white, the Kohen will quarantine the affliction for seven days." (13:4)

The Kohen represents the trait of chesed (kindness). Ve'hisgir (he will quarantine) literally means "he will close up." When a person manifests kindness in the world, he "closes up" - i.e., heals - all illnesses and attains healing for all wounds. (See Likutei Moharan II, 4)

OKAY TO NOT KNOW

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"If it is a snow-white spot in the skin of the flesh, and it does not appear deeper than the skin, and its hair did not turn white..." (13:4)

The Yerushalmi states: What is the greatness of an adam gadol (great person)? That he is not embarrassed to say, "I have not heard [the answer]" (Chagigah 1:8).

While defining the meaning of the above pasuk, Rashi writes, humbly and unabashedly, I do not know the explanation.

The great commentator, whose enlightening remarks have opened up the pathways of the Written and Oral Torah for all eternity, is not above admitting that there are things that he does not understand. And if he does not comprehend something, his integrity is such that he cannot bring himself to offer an explanation that is not in line with the absolute truth! How great are our luminaries, who live their lives through the prism of Torah and guide us with their actions!

The first rabbinic position that Rav Yechezkel Abramsky zt'l accepted was in the city of Smolian. The second Shabbos after his inauguration was one of the arba parshiyos, the four weeks when many shuls recite the yotzros (liturgical poems) during the Shemoneh Esrei. The words are notoriously difficult, although the blend of polemic verse is truly inspiring to the educated.

One of the ba'alei batim in the shul felt the need to "test" the new rabbi and decided to approach him after davening. He asked if he could explain the deeper meaning of one of the more difficult lines from the piyutim.

R' Yechezkel was young, but he was not intimidated. In a voice that reverberated throughout the large room, he announced, "I do not know!" The people were shocked and began to doubt the validity of their new rabbi.

But R' Yechezkel had admitted to his lack of understanding for a reason. As he later explained, "Let them all know that I am not perfect. I will serve as their rav and answer their she'eilos, but I am not an angel. There are things that I don't know!"

OUR INNER KOHEN

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If the lesion has become darker and the lesion has not spread on the skin, the kohen must pronounce him pure; it has become a mispachas. He must immerse his garments and be rid of defilement." (13:6)

It would seem more logical that someone with a lesion be brought to an expert in Jewish law to determine if he is indeed afflicted with tzaraas. The reason why the Torah specifies that a kohen make this determination is because the kohanim are devoted totally to the service of G-d. Their holiness-centered lifestyle keeps them immune from the worldly perspective that sees every effect as the deserved result of some cause. Thus, they are uniquely positioned to see the good in others and enable them to see the good in themselves. This is what eventually heals the person from tzaraas.

Similarly, whenever we confront a potential spiritual defect in ourselves, we must access our inner "kohen," our pristine connection to G-d, in order to view that defect in a way that will lead to its healing. If we find it difficult to summon our own inner kohen, we should seek out someone who can substitute for it, in order to cure ourselves in a wholesome and positive manner. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

THE UNBIASED MESSENGER

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"When there is a skin-eruption of tzaraas on a person, he shall be brought to the kohen." (13:9)

Mashal: Once a chassid came to the Kotzker Rebbe, R' Menachem Mendel Morgenstern zt'l, to seek his advice about a matter relating to marriage. When the rebbe gave his response, though, the chassid was dissatisfied with the evasive answer and tried to negotiate for a more definitive response.

The Kotzker became impatient. "Do you really believe that when people come to ask for my advice, I go up to Heaven and open the book to see what is inscribed there? Such an idea is brazen insolence."

The chassid shrank back with trepidation "Would you like to know what does happen when somebody comes to me for advice?" asked the Rebbe, a bit softer.

The Rebbe continued. "It makes me self-conscious, for when somebody is preoccupied with his own importance, he loses his sense of objectivity. So first, I must do away with my arrogance and regain pure judgment; then I must consider if what I am going to say is in accord with the law of the Torah, and later on, if it is fair and just. Only after I have done all that, can I give worthwhile advice."

Nimshal: When a person is afflicted with a terrible plague of leprosy, the only person he can turn to is the kohen. It is up to the kohen, the priestly representative of the Almighty Himself, to determine the status of the affliction and if it has become pure. The kohen is imbued with his spiritual power only through an acceptance of his role as a tributary which allows the holiness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu to portend through him.

SIGNS OF REDEMPTION

Chasam Sofer

"If the kohen shall look and behold the affliction has covered his entire body, then he shall proclaim the affliction to be pure, having turned completely white." (13:13)

The son of Dovid will not come until all of the kingdom will have turned to heresy. Rava said: "How do we know this? From the pasuk stating that he whose flesh has turned entirely white is pure." (Sanhedrin 96)

When all the heathen kingdoms have turned to wickedness it is a sign that the Mashiach is surely about to appear.

It is obvious that G-d allowed a king as cruel as Haman to arise so that oppression and evil decrees would cause the Jews to repent of their transgressions. When all people are so utterly depraved that all shame and fear of G-d has vanished, and the Jews are tortured without mercy, oppression will purify the Jews' hearts. And when the "evil kingdom" will have accomplished this task it will be destroyed, yielding place to the son of Dovid, Mashiach.

(HaDerash VeHalyun comments: The Sages foresaw the coming of an era of utter spiritual decadence, when heresy and unbelief - the tzaraas of the spirit - will gain control of the body of the Jewish people. Afraid that the Jews would despair, they left a message of comfort, pointing out that when all our merits will have vanished, that will be the time of our cleansing. At that point, G-d will have mercy on His people and send Mashiach - the scion of the House of Dovid - to deliver us.)

ACKNOWLEDGING THE SIGNS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"If the kohen shall look and behold the affliction has covered his entire body, then he shall proclaim the affliction to be pure, having turned completely white." (13:13)

The Torah records an interesting detail pertaining to identifying tzaraas. The Torah tells us that if one were to be fully covered with tzaraas and go before the kohen to find out how to proceed, the kohen would pronounce the individual as pure, and the individual would be able to remain in the camp of Israel. However, if a person was only partially covered with tzaraas and was subsequently diagnosed (by the kohen) with the disease, the person is then quarantined outside the camp for a minimum of seven days. This halachah seems to be counterintuitive. One would think that if one is deemed impure and excommunicated when partially covered with tzaraas, then one would certainly be declared impure and expelled from the camp when fully covered. How are we to resolve this difficulty?

The Chofetz Chaim explains that the punishment of tzaraas is Hashem's way of communicating to a person that they have done something wrong. Therefore, if a person were to be only partially covered, they may think that the affliction that they have is simply some type of physical skin ailment. It is for this reason that they need the kohen to explicitly tell them that they have tzaraas, for which they need to leave the camp to reflect on their transgressions. However, if one is completely covered with tzaraas, there is no way for the person to think that they are clean of their iniquities. As a result, they will be forced to confront their aveiros without the need of a kohen to bring it to their attention. It is for this reason that excommunication is not necessary.

As we progress through life, there are times in which we behave in ways that we know are wrong. Yet, we rationalize and justify our behavior so that we don't have to live with the burden and guilt. As a result, we need others who care about us to point out our wrongdoings so that we can address them and remedy our areas of weakness. The Torah is teaching us that we must be open to the rebuke. We have to be receptive to the feedback of others in circumstances in which we are incapable of rectifying the situations on our own. With this approach, we will be able to continue to refine our character and ensure that we lead a life of purity and kedushah.

SIGNS OF MASHIACH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If the kohen shall look and behold the affliction has covered his entire body, then he shall proclaim the affliction to be pure, having turned completely white." (13:13)

One of the signs given by the sages that Mashiach's arrival is imminent is that "the government has become heretical." This notion is alluded to in the law that if tzaraas covers the entire body, the person is not defiled.

There are two ways that the world's governments can be considered to have become "heretical."

The negative way is for heresy to indeed infect all the world's governments.

The positive way is for the truth of the Torah to become so self-evident that it will be universally acknowledged that any government that does not submit to the Torah's rules is "heretical."

It is our hope and prayer that redemption occurs the second way.

It is therefore imperative that the Jewish people encourage the nations of the world to fulfill the commandments that the Torah obligates them to observe (the "Noahide" laws).

By acknowledging the Torah as the sole possible basis for true ethical behavior and moral justice, the non-Jewish world will come to recognize and appreciate the Jewish people as the vanguards of universal justice, morality, and peace. This will pave the way for the ultimate, Messianic Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 32, pp. 77-83) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

THE VALUE OF JOY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"On the day that live flesh appears in [the lesion], he will be declared defiled." (13:14)

A kohen may examine someone suspected of suffering from tzaraas and declare him defiled only on certain days.

During the festivals, or in the case of a bridegroom during the seven days of rejoicing following his wedding, the kohen may not inspect the suspected sufferer (Nega'im 3:2).

We see from this how greatly G-d prizes the joy even of someone guilty of whatever misconduct caused him to break out with tzaraas.

G-d insists that this person's process of repentance be delayed so as not to mitigate his joyful observance of the festivals or his wedding.

From this we can learn to value fulfilling G-d's commandments specifically with joy - both with regard to ourselves and with regard to others. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 37, pp. 37-41) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HOLINESS IN UNITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The person afflicted with tzaraas must dwell isolated; his dwelling must be outside the camp." (13:15)

The simple reason why someone afflicted with tzaraas must reside outside the camp is so he can experience firsthand the alienation that results from slanderous speech. This will motivate him to repent.

On a somewhat deeper level, the reason for his banishment is because the defining characteristic of holiness is unity.

Holiness rests on individuals or a group when they renounce their egocentricity in favor of being focused on G-d and performing His will. Those who have submitted to G-d's higher authority and have ascended to His higher perspective get along with each other easily and willingly.

Thus, those who promote dissension are by that very fact excluded from even the outermost "camp" of holiness.

Nonetheless, G-d assures us that no matter how far we may stray from holiness, He will bring us back. The next section of the Torah therefore discusses how a person afflicted with tzaraas is to be purified of his ritual defilement in order to resume his life with the community. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, pp. 101-102) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SPIRITUAL BLOCKAGES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If on the place of the inflammation there will be a white s'eis or a reddish-white baheres, it shall be shown to the kohen [in order to determine if he is afflicted with tzaraas.]" (13:19)

When G-d causes tzaraas to appear on a person's skin, He does so by limiting the circulation of blood in a specific area of the skin, which then turns white. This blockage in the circulation is the physical symptom of a similar, spiritual blockage.

The spiritual blockage that results in physical tzaraas occurs when our feelings of spiritual inspiration fail to humble us as they should. Instead of making us into better people, our enhanced awareness of G-d inflates our ego.

This amplified sense of self-worth intoxicates us with overconfidence. If left unchecked, this self-righteousness can corrupt us in many ways.

It is therefore important to make sure that no such spiritual blockage occurs, that spiritual inspiration always humbles us and is expressed in our concern for others. (Likutei Torah 2:23b, 24a, 24c; BeSha'ah sheHikdimu 5672, vol. 1, p. 370; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5714-5716, p. 511) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ELEVATING IMPERFECTIONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If it has spread on the skin, the kohen must pronounce him defiled; it is a tzaraas-lesion." (13:22)

Tzaraas only affects people of advanced spiritual development. Despite the spiritual heights to which such people have climbed, they may still have some minor spiritual faults - so minor that they might not be aware of them. When evidence of these faults surfaces in the form of tzaraas, the afflicted person is separated from the community until the faults are rectified. When they are rectified, however, the individual is thereby elevated to a higher spiritual level than he could have reached otherwise.

From all this we can learn two things: Firstly, no matter how far along the path of spiritual development we may think we have advanced, there might still be subtle spiritual imperfections that need to be rooted out. This keeps us humble.

Secondly, we should not shy away from having these imperfections pointed out to us, for attending to them is a springboard to further and greater spiritual growth. (Sichot Kodesh 5741, vol. 3, pp. 20-21) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SOCIAL SAFETY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If the healed area of the burn turns into a white spot..." (13:24)

White is a symbol of purity and innocence. Therefore, the appearance of an abnormally white spot on the flesh can also indicate an overabundance of holy spiritual energy. This can happen when our experience of holy rapture is not balanced by an equal sense of humble commitment to our Divine mission.

In this context, the sin of gossip - which tzaraas is meant to indicate - can be seen as too much of what could have (and should have) been a good or even holy thing, but instead degenerated into the opposite. We are all aware of how powerful speech can be in forging social ties and promoting peace. Whether we are conscious of it or not, this is why we enjoy social conversation, clarifying issues with each other until we reach a mutual understanding. When, however, a hidden excess of ego insists that our reputation or esteem take precedence over the advancement of social harmony, some gossip or slander is inadvertently released in the excitement of conversation. It is therefore crucial that we remain constantly on guard, so only good come out of our social conversation. (Likutei Torah 2:22b, 25b; Likutei Sichot, vol. 37, pp. 33-36; Sefer HaSichot 5751, vol. 2, pp. 492-494) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

STUNTED GROWTH

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"If the healed area of the burn turns into a white spot..." (13:24)

The Torah lists three types of skin discolorations that qualify as tzaraas - שאת, בהרת, ספחת. The term שאת refers to the color of natural wool; בהרת denotes the whiteness of snow; and ספחת signifies the secondary colors that resemble these two shades of white.

Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk, in Noam Elimelech, sees in these terms an allusion to the three primary obstacles to growth, the three characteristics that prevent us from advancing and becoming the best versions of ourselves, resulting in נגעים, spiritual maladies.

שאת is related to התנשאות - arrogance and conceit. If a person thinks of himself as complete, as superior, as better than all others, then he has nobody from whom to learn. He will never humble himself to receive new information, to question his behavior, or to acknowledge the need to change. And so such a person will never grow.

ספחת stems from the root ספח, which refers to something that is attached. A second obstacle to growth is associating with the wrong people, placing oneself in bad company, exposing oneself to negative influences. Even if one wishes to grow and advance, negative peer pressure will get in the way. We are profoundly affected by our surroundings, and so it is vital that we place ourselves in the company of worthy role models, of those who will elevate us instead of pulling us down.

Finally, בהרת is related to the word בהיר, clear. A person will never grow if he assumes that he already has pristine clarity, that he already understands everything there is to understand, that he already has all the answers. In order to grow, we need to admit that we are confused, that we lack clarity, that there is much that we do not yet know or understand. Only once we acknowledge how much we have yet to learn can we hope to learn and progress.

STRAIGHT TO HIS HEAD

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If a man or a woman has a lesion on the head..." (13:29)

The eruption of tzaraas on the head is caused by self-pride and arrogance, as opposed to tzaraas elsewhere on the body, which is the result of gossip or slander. The reason for this difference is that gossip and slander are superficial misdeeds, which therefore affect the skin elsewhere on the body. Pride and arrogance, in contrast, are warped mental attitudes, and therefore they affect the head.

We should continuously strive to eliminate these character imperfections. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, p. 99) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

WHEN IN DOUBT

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"He is clean, and the kohen shall declare him clean." (13:37)

The Yerushalmi (Terumos 5) writes: "Just as it is forbidden to declare pure that which is impure, so, too, is it forbidden to declare impure that which is pure." It is understandable that one should always try to provide the correct response and never willfully forbid the permitted, but why is the term "forbidden" applied? Is it really a sin to extend the impurity for a few more days? After all, no harm done - or was there?

The Sefer Alei Tamar writes that indeed, one who errs on the side of leniency (declares something which is impure to be pure) has transgressed against Hashem for only He knows the absolute truth. On the other hand, one who errs on the side of stringency is guilty of a dual offense: (1) against Hashem for misinterpreting the words of the Torah, and (2) against his fellow man to whom he causes a loss. Depriving another of what belongs to him - his property, his possessions, and his time - is a serious misdeed irrespective of the amount involved. Thus, he who forbids the permitted is guilty of a more serious offense than one who permits the forbidden!

The Shelah HaKadosh, R' Yeshaya Halevi Hurvitz zt'l, notes that if there is no reason for one to rule stringently, but he does so only out of a lack of knowledge, even for himself, then he is nothing more than a chassid shoteh - foolish pious man. The Shach zt'l, however, goes further and says that it is actually forbidden to rule stringently for no reason, because prohibiting the permitted may eventually result in an unjustified leniency in a later ruling.

PRECIOUS PRAYERS

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"...and he is to call out, 'Tamei, Tamei' ['Impure, Impure']." (13:45)

The Gemara (Shabbos 60a) teaches that the purpose of this is so that the Metzora's pain is known to others, and they would pray for his recovery. The Gemara says that we see from this that when one's tree is not producing fruit he should put a mark on the tree so that other people see it and know to pray for it to be revived.

HaRav Yechezkel Levenstein zt'l explained: The Gemara isn't suggesting that we declare an intense "day of prayer" on behalf of the tree. Rather, as someone walks by, they will see the barren tree and utter a quick prayer as they pass by. This is because even the smallest request to Hashem is treasured by him.

You should never say, "I don't have time for a long prayer, I might as well not pray." Every prayer to Hashem is precious.

POWER OF A SINGLE WORD

Rabbi Dov Katz

“And the person with tzaraas in whom there is the affliction, his garments shall be rent, and the hair on his head shall be unshorn, and he shall cover himself up to his lips, and he is to call out, ‘Tamei, Tamei’ [‘Impure, Impure’].” (13:45)

When someone develops tzaraas from speaking lashon hara, he is forced to publicly declare that he is “tamei, impure”. The Dubna Maggid used to say that the Torah is teaching us a very important lesson with this commandment. He explained that many people speak lashon hara because they do not feel that their words are really so harmful. After all, how can a few words cause such damage to a person? To answer this claim, the Torah makes this person say just one word - “Tamei” - to show him, and those around him, how just one word can change someone's life so drastically.

In fact, the damage that a few careless words can cause is so great that Rav Yisroel Salanter was known to say, “If you say that a Rabbi can't sing, or a chazzan can't learn, that is lashon hara, but if you say that a Rabbi can't learn and a Chazzan can't sing, that is tantamount to murder” and he would conclude by declaring, “It is worthwhile for a person to study Mussar his entire life if it will save him from speaking lashon hara even once” (Tenuas HaMussar, vol. 1, p. 305).

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And the person with tzaraas in whom there is an affliction...” (13:45)

The sad fact is that despite lashon hara being the primary cause why the Beis HaMikdash has not yet been rebuilt, we are not as careful as we should be. So much so, that the Gemara declares that everyone is guilty of stumbling in some form of lashon hara.

It is for this reason, said Rav Yisrael Salanter, that the parashah of Tazria which deals with the impurity that one receives from speaking lashon hara, immediately follows the parashah of Shemini, which deals with the prohibition of forbidden food, as if to say: Look how careful you are with what goes into your mouth. It is this same care - and perhaps even greater care - that you need for whatever leaves your mouth!

The Chofetz Chaim himself draws a stark comparison between what enters and leaves our mouths. He asks us to imagine seeing our friend eating a forkful of bacon. Would we immediately confront him or wait until he has first finished the entire plate? Yet, when it comes to hearing his derogatory speech, where every new word is like eating another bite of bacon, we let our friend finish what he has to say, and often do not even rebuke him afterward.

In fact, noting some of the deeper meaning behind the Hebrew letters and their alphabetical sequence, the Kedushas Levi writes that the letter samech ם comes before the ayin (ע), peh (פ), and tzaddik (צ) to hint that just as the samech is closed, so too, if our ayin - “eye”, and peh “mouth” are closed from inappropriate and forbidden things, then this is what will lead us to become a tzaddik, “righteous.”

The advancement of technology has increased our challenges in this area manifold. Within seconds we can access an unfathomable amount of information from around the entire world, and we have the ability to spread our opinions much further and much quicker than ever before - with the potential to cause more damage with our words than was ever previously possible. Seemingly, no generation has faced a greater challenge in this area. On the other hand, however, this means that every time we prevent ourselves from saying a prohibited word, or sharing an inappropriate opinion, or if we stop ourselves from listening to someone's malicious speech, our reward is so much greater (see Pirkei Avos 5:22).

THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When a garment that has the lesion of tzaraas on it...” (13:47)

Our skin, clothing, and homes are three increasingly external layers that envelop us.

Tzaraas first affected the outermost “garment,” the house, because at first, gossip is a totally superficial symptom.

If the individual did not take this cue, neglecting to purge himself of his hidden negativity, tzaraas broke out on his clothing. This indicated that his hidden flaws had started to seep into him from the outside.

If he ignored this cue as well, tzaraas broke out on his skin, indicating that his inner evil, although still superficial, was now part of him. At this stage, he had to be ostracized from society, with the hope that this demonstration of the consequences of his misbehavior would inspire him to mend his ways. (Likutei Torah 2:22b; Likutei Sichot, vol. 22, pp. 65-69, 74-75; Igrot Kodesh, vol 11, p. 248) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

MAKING A CHANGE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“The kohen shall look after the affliction has been washed and behold - the affliction has not changed its color...” (13:55)

Rashi understands the words “lo hafach ha'negah es eino” - “the affliction has not changed its color,” to mean that the color did not become lighter than its original appearance.

HAFTORAH

Rav Yisrael Meir Druck (Esh Tamid) explains, based on the Imrei Emes, an incredible, alternative way of understanding these words. He states that tzaraas is a result of the negative way in which we look at and judge people. When the kohen comes to check the person who may have tzaraas, he looks to see whether their attitude and outlook on others has changed. The kohen attempts to not only determine whether the person should be diagnosed with tzaraas but also whether this experience has helped to adjust the person's perspectives. This is what the Torah means when it says "lo hafach ha'negah es eino"; the afflicted person's ayin - "eye," or perspective, has not changed. This results in the person remaining in a state of tumah and quarantine.

Each one of us confronts unique challenges that we have to endure. We must ask ourselves: "Do we allow those experiences to alter our approaches to life and reshape our perspectives?" If we simply coast through life's ups and downs without letting them to impact who we are, then we are not likely to grow. When we position ourselves to be open to all opportunities for improvement, we will be able to use each and every experience as a lesson to grow from, which is what Hashem intended all along.

SEEKING MERIT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The kohen shall look after the affliction has been washed and behold - the affliction has not changed its color..." (13:55)

The Torah specifically requires the kohen to judge cases of tzaraas because they are the spiritual heirs of the very first *kohen*, Aharon, who was famous for promoting brotherly love among the Jewish people. Because of their love for their fellow Jews, the kohen - while taking care not to bend the law of the Torah in any way - will make absolutely sure that the law indeed requires them to pronounce the sufferer defiled before doing so. And if the kohen do have to declare a person defiled, they will do whatever it takes to declare him undefiled at the earliest possible opportunity.

Similarly, when we encounter someone who appears to be afflicted with some negative character trait, we should not rush to reject him. Rather, we should first examine ourselves, in order to determine how well we exemplify the ideals of brotherly love. If we are in any way lacking in this regard, we have no right to pass judgment on others, for it could well be that our perception is skewed by our unrefined feelings.

By learning from Aharon how to love our fellows regardless of their objective behavior, we counteract the cause of our present exile, unwarranted hatred. This will hasten the final, Messianic Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, pp. 88-91) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

HUMBLING HEALING

Maskil L'Ayson

"[Elisha] sent to the king, saying, '...Let him [Naaman] come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.'" (II Melachim 5:8)

According to the Sages, tzaraas is caused by arrogance. Hence, the cure is for the person afflicted to become humble.

Accordingly, Elisha said to the king: "Let him [Naaman] come to me." It is true that I would be able to heal him even from a distance. However, his trouble was caused by his arrogance, in that he imagined himself an important man, "a powerful man of valor" (5:1), and did not consider it appropriate in his high position to come to me. Now, since the only cure for his affliction is humility, he must humble himself and come to me.

When Naaman finally did come, Elisha did not personally receive him but sent a messenger (5:10) to give him his instructions, all in order to rid him of his arrogance and humble him so that he would be healed of his affliction.

MIRACLE OF NATURE

Shir Meon

"And Elisha sent a messenger to him [Naaman], saying, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall come back to you, and you shall be clean.'" (II Melachim 5:10)

Naaman shared the view of those nonbelievers, who, while acknowledging the existence of a Divine Creator, claim that nature, once created, functions without Divine supervision and therefore regard only supernatural phenomena as manifestations of Divine Providence. He therefore expected that Elisha would perform some supernatural act to heal him.

Elisha, however, wanted to teach him that ordinary day-to-day happenings in nature are guided by G-d no less than supernatural events. This is why he told Naaman to immerse himself in the Jordan river. When the captain would see that although the waters of the powerful Damascus, the Amanah, and Pharpar had been of no avail, the Jordan's waters - a river like all other rivers - would cure him, he would understand that even the common elements of nature are guided by Divine Providence and can act only in accordance with G-d's will.

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