

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Tazria

To join our Whatsapp group for daily messages, contact us at 845-641-2648

לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

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 Halakhos 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 Wisniefsky

LET THE LIGHT IN

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“If a person 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 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 עוור - 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 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 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 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.

JOYFUL RETURN

Avnei Ezel

"If a person 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.

THERE FOR OTHERS

Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld

"If a person 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)

We find a fascinating idea in this week's Parshah. When someone experiences unusual symptoms of leprosy, he must go to the *Kohen* who will determine what course of action he must take. Why does the *Kohen* need to be approached specifically for this purpose? We know that when a person has a *halachic* question, he goes to ask a Rav. Why, in this case, must he go to a *Kohen*?

The Kli Yakar answers that the *Kohen* represents peace. Aharon ha'Kohen was known as the one who was "שָׁלוֹם וְרוּדֵף שָׁלוֹם" - he loved peace and he pursued peace. When a person speaks *lashon hara* and is punished with leprosy, he has done something which destroys peace and engenders hatred and disdain among people. The requirement that he go to the *Kohen* reminds him that he was punished because he did not act with the proper sense of love and peace towards his fellow Jew, which the *Kohen* represents.

An accomplished young Torah scholar once came to Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman zt"l with an important question. He had been offered a position as a *Rosh Kollel* outside of Israel and he came to get the *gadol's* blessing and advice in taking the position. The first thing Rav Shteinman said to him was a question: "Does your wife have friends in the new country?"

The *avreich* lightheartedly pulled out his cellphone and explained to the *Rosh Yeshiva* that, today, we all have phones, and his wife can easily call any of her friends, whenever she wants, wherever she is. The *Rosh Yeshiva* was not satisfied and he pressed further. "Did the *metzora* who must leave the camp and spend seven days alone have access to a telephone?" The *avreich* nodded shyly, unsure as to what point Rav Shteinman was trying to make.

The *Rosh Yeshiva* explained. "Even if a *metzora* has a telephone, he is still considered alone. A telephone is not enough for your wife! If your wife does not have friends in that country, then you should forgo the position."

This is a powerful lesson for us. We see not only the incredible *ahavas Yisrael* for every person, even one he never met, that Rav Shteinman had, but we also learn from the *gadol ha'dor* who carried so much responsibility on his shoulders what our priorities must be.

Now, during *Sefiras ha'Omer*, the period when the *talmidim* of Rebbe Akiva died for their lack of *ahavas Yisrael* for one another, we can work on ourselves and try to make an effort to think about our relationships with others, and we will merit to enter Shavuot with a renewed love and respect for our fellow Jew.

SUBTLE SLIPS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If a person 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 Wisniefsky

SPIRITUAL PORES

Sefas Emes

"If a person 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.

ACTIVE SILENCE

Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

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

Parashas Tazria addresses the curious spiritual malady known as *tzaraas*. Although *tzaraas* would seem to resemble a skin condition of sorts, our Sages assure us that at the core of this malady is an inner pollution primarily caused when one speaks ill about his fellow - *lashon hara*.

The Midrash relates an incident by the great Tannaic sage, Rabbi Yannai. A certain peddler arrives in the town of Rabbi Yannai and creates a stir. He shouts, "Who wants life? Who wants life?" - implying he has in his possession an elixir of life! Curious, Rabbi Yannai summoned this "life-monger" and demanded he show his wares. The fellow simply opened a Tehillim and pointed to the verse (Tehillim 34:13) that states, "Who is he that desires life? Guard your tongue from evil..." Rabbi Yannai responded in awe. His whole life he read that verse and never fully understood the meaning! This peddler's shtick taught Rabbi Yannai the true intent of this verse. The Midrash is puzzling; clever as the peddler may have been, what precisely did Rabbi Yannai glean from his gimmick? What was revealed from this verse that was not otherwise apparent?

The great Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer? in his approbation to *Ikrei Dinim* (an abridged *Sefer Chafetz Chaim* written by Rabbi Shmuel Hominer) gives a novel explanation. He explains that the 613 *mitzvos* in the Torah are divided by *mitzvos aseh* (activities we are obligated to actively do), and *mitzvos lo saaseh* (activities we are meant to avoid). Although our Rabbis teach that "when one stays put and avoids sin it is as if he is actively performing a *mitzvah*," negative commandments function very differently than positive commandments. When we avoid a negative act, it is like avoiding danger; while very important, it is not productive. As opposed to actively doing something to enhance or elongate our life, which we view as productive, is an act of building.

Rav Isser Zalman explains that Rabbi Yannai originally related to the sin of *lashon hara* as a harmful poison, which must be avoided at all costs; vital, but not life-giving or life-enhancing. This peddler understood that the *mitzvah* to abstain from speaking *lashon hara* is not like other negative commandments. Although we abstain from *lashon hara*, it functions like the elixir of life. It is life giving. Rabbi Yannai now had a new understanding of the message of the verse: Abstaining from speaking ill about others is a productive act. When we are careful about the way we speak, we change our essence. We become more holy and more spiritual. We significantly enhance and add more value to our lives.

The decision to be cautious about the way we speak about others is life altering. It is a positive force for ourselves, our families, and our relationship with the Almighty, of which the rewarding reverberations can almost be tangible.

PEACE TAKES PRECEDENCE

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"If a person 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 Rebbe of Alexander writes that *tzaraas* is brought as a result of speaking *lashon hara*. Often, those who spoke this *lashon hara* did so with the justification that it is essential to tell the truth. However, their zeal to protect *emes* led them to speak *lashon hara*, an outcome of which is *machlokes*.

Therefore, the Torah says that they have to be brought to Aharon HaKohen because, while their righteous defense of truth led to confrontation and strife, Aharon's approach to life was precisely the opposite. Aharon HaKohen was prepared to bend the facts to achieve *shalom*.

The Avos D'Rabbi Nosson (12:3) teaches us that when two people had argued and were angry with each other, Aharon would go and sit with one of them and say that he had just seen the other, that the other was distraught over the pain he had caused, and that he is looking to make amends. Aharon would then go to the second person involved in the dispute and say the same thing about his antagonist. The result would be that the next time these two enemies met each other, they would apologize, and their friendship would be resumed.

Was each side truly distraught about their argument? Were they sincerely looking to mend the unpleasant situation between them? The Avos D'Rabbi Nosson does not say. But, since Aharon HaKohen's approach to life was that *achdus* and *shalom* should reign supreme in *Klal Yisrael*, he took the measures necessary to ensure that this would indeed be the case.

The Torah shows us that if there is a battle between *emes* and *shalom*, our overriding value is to ensure that there is *achdus* and *shalom* in our marriages, in our families, and in our communities.

If by defending *emes* you speak *lashon hara*, then the result is *tzaraas*. If by defending *shalom* you are "generous" with the truth, then the result is that you become appointed the *Kohen Gadol*. (Otzar Chaim, p. 73)

RESPONDING WITH COMPASSION

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"If a person 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)

Parashas Tazria describes the process of identifying and treating *tzaraas* (skin discoloration), a physical manifestation of the spiritual sin of speaking slander. The first step in treating the blemish is to bring it to Aharon the *Kohen* or to one of his sons, the *Kohanim*, so that the *Kohen* may determine the severity of the *tzaraas* and its

respective quarantine (13:2). If any of the *Kohanim* are qualified to help, why does the Torah specifically mention Aharon?

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig suggests that the remedy for *tzaraas* is interacting with a *Kohen*, but what else does the *Kohen* do besides declaring the person infected? Referencing Aharon ensures that the assigned *Kohen* will emulate Aharon's qualities - those of compassion and understanding. Speaking or tolerating negative comments about others reveals diminished self-esteem, so when we encounter someone with such a disposition, we have the opportunity to respond with love and sensitivity.

POWER OF TEHILLIM

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"If a person 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 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 *negaim* (plagues) and *ohalos* (tents) (Midrash Shocher 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 *negaim*. 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.

ADMITTING OUR FAULTS

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"If a person 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 Netziv cites the Zohar's comment that out of all the words that the Torah uses to describe a person, the word אדם is the highest form.

Against this backdrop, the Netziv wonders why the Torah uses this term to describe someone who has *tzaraas*, as the verse says, אדם כי יהיה בעור בשחו... לנגע צרעת.

A person is afflicted with *tzaraas* primarily because he spoke *lashon hara* or was stingy.

Why is a person who has exhibited these negative traits and been punished for it described as אדם, which is reserved for someone who is on a very high level?

Rabbi Nissan Alpert suggests the following answer to the question of the Netziv.

We usually assume that the difference between a great person and a regular person is that the great person has no faults, whereas the ordinary person has flaws. The reality is that everyone has faults. If so, what differentiates a great person from everyone else?

A great person is someone who is aware that he has faults and attempts to overcome and correct those faults. A regular person is someone who has weaknesses and is content to remain with those weaknesses.

When a person is afflicted with *tzaraas* and realizes that it came to him as a result of some flaw in his behavior, and והוא אל הכהן - comes to the *Kohen* to be advised as to how to correct his defect, such a person is indeed great, deserving of the title אדם.

No one is born great, but a person who strives to improve and aspires for greatness is great - whether or not they manage to achieve and reach the goals they have set.

The person who accepts his flaws and is content to live with his faults can never be great.

As Rabbi Isaac Bernstein stated in the name of a certain *Rosh Yeshiva*: "The minimum that Hashem expects from us is our maximum."

PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT

Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

"...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)

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.

SUPPORTING THE AFFLICTED

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"...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)

Parashas Tazria details the procedures for a person afflicted with *tzaraas*, including inspections and declarations by a local *Kohen*. In the forty-seven *pesukim* that discuss the affliction, the *Kohen* is mentioned forty-five times. The Torah already included plenty of details about the *tzaraas*; why did the Torah overstate the fact that the *Kohen* monitors the entire process?

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky explains that since part of the healing process includes quarantine, it is easy for a person to feel alone. The *Kohen* is the one to declare the affliction initially, but he must also be there to compassionately provide support through the seclusion period and reintegration back into society. The Torah highlighted it forty-five times since it is so important that people don't feel alone, reminding us that we need to support each other, especially when times are tough. Sharing in the burdens of others can transform a challenging experience into a meaningful expression of compassion.

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

"If it is a white baheres on the skin of his flesh, and it does not appear deeper than the skin, and its hair did not turn white, the Kohen will close off 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 *Likutey Moharan* II, 4)

OKAY TO NOT KNOW

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"If it is a white baheres on the skin of his flesh, and it does not appear deeper than the skin, and its hair did not turn white, the Kohen will close off the affliction for seven days." (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 dimmed and the lesion has not spread on the skin, the kohen must pronounce him pure..." (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.

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 Wisniewsky

THE VALUE OF JOY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"On the day that healthy flesh appears in it [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 (Negaim 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 Wisniefsky

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." (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; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5714-5716, p. 511) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

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 Wisniefsky

STUNTED GROWTH

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"If a person will have a burn from fire on his skin, and the healed skin of the burn is a reddish-white baheres or is all white..." (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.

SOCIAL SAFETY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If a person will have a burn from fire on his skin, and the healed skin of the burn is a reddish-white baheres or is all white..." (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) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

ONE THING AT A TIME

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"If a person will have a burn from fire on his skin, and the healed skin of the burn is a reddish-white baheres or is all white..." (13:24)

After describing the procedure for one that finds a burn that turns into *tzaraas*, the *parashah* describes yet again the procedure for finding a burn that turns into *tzaraas* (13:24-27). As the procedures are identical, Rashi explains that the Torah lists them again to teach us that each case must be evaluated independently. However, would it not have been more efficient to simply tell us that each case is to be evaluated separately?

A possible explanation for this duplicate description is to demonstrate the importance of attending to each malady separately. This rule has many applications in our lives, such as labeling children as "troubled," relationships as "doomed," or systems as "corrupt." Rather than painting challenges with broad strokes, parsing the individual issues and treating each one separately is a much more constructive method of overcoming those obstacles. If grouping challenges creates unhelpful labels, tackling each one individually fosters hope, possible solutions, and positive outcomes.

STRAIGHT TO HIS HEAD

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"A man or a woman in whom there will be an affliction, on the scalp or in the beard..." (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 Wisniefsky

WHEN IN DOUBT

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"But if the nesek has retained its appearance, and dark hair has sprouted in it, the nesek has healed – it is pure; the Kohen shall declare it pure." (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.

TAKING THE CUE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“The Kohen shall look, and behold! – on the skin of their flesh are dim white spots, it is a bohak that has erupted on the skin, it is pure.” (13:39)

The Torah addresses the “bohak” (pigmentation), the condition of dim white skin spots on the flesh, which indicates that the *Kohen* should take a look, and states matter-of-factly in the very next sentence that they are considered clean (13:39). If the one afflicted knows that it’s not an issue, why would they need to go to the *Kohen* for a diagnosis?

Rav Moshe Feinstein suggests that any change, inconvenience, or even minor distress is guidance to introspect and take action. The Torah’s requirement to visit a *Kohen* indicates that accepting life’s curveballs is par for the course, but the more commendable direction is using them as springboards for self-improvement.

VALUING COMMUNITY

Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

“And the person with tzaraas in whom there is the affliction... he is to call out, ‘Impure! Impure!’” (13:45)

The Gemara (Shabbos 67a) relates an unusual ancient practice done by fruit farmers with a failing tree. The owner of the tree would paint or dye the tree red. The Gemara explains that this practice was done to alert others as to this tree’s health. People passing the tree would understand the owner’s predicament and be compelled to pray on his behalf for the well-being of the tree. The Gemara sources this practice from a law in the Torah (Vayikra 13:45) regarding one who is afflicted with the spiritual malady and impurity called *tzaraas*. The *metzora* is afflicted due to his sin of speaking ill of others and causing division in the community.

The sin of speaking ill of others, *lashon hara*, is considered egregious, and therefore the *metzora*’s process toward purification is severe. While he is impure, he must dwell alone, outside of the settlement. He must grow his hair, wear ripped clothing, cover his face, and call out to passersby “*Tamei! Tamei!*” - I am impure! I am impure!” The Gemara understands that his call of “*Tamei!*” will induce passersby to pray on his behalf. Just as the *metzora* notifies others of his plight to induce his brethren to pray for him, the tree farmer notifies his brethren to arouse their prayer.

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, the *mashgiach* from the Mirrer Yeshiva, related that his rebbi, Rav Simchah Zissel Ziv, the Alter of Kelm, would often reference this Gemara. He would explain that this Gemara typifies the ideal sense of brotherhood, which can be natural in the Jewish community. In times of old, a man would paint his ailing tree red. The simple people walking by would empathize with the pain of the fruit farmer and be driven to do their part to help by praying for the well-being of their Jewish brother.

The Gemara in Arachin teaches that the *metzora* must dwell in isolation. This punishment is measure for measure; as he tried to cause division, so he must atone for his sins by being alone. Yet, the Torah obligates him to announce his status. Perhaps this is so that the *metzora* will learn of the unique value of his community, and he will come to realize what the fruit farmer knows, that there is a deep sense of connection between one Jew and another; that Jews pray for members of their community without being asked. This can drive home a deeper sense of an appreciation of community. He can realize how abhorrent his divisive behavior was and forge a path forward in his *teshuvah* process.

We can all recognize the value of a community that feels so connected to one another that when alerted of another’s plight, individuals are instinctively driven to pray. The more we can appreciate the value of being part of a compassionate community, the more we can recognize the scourge of *lashon hara* and other divisive behaviors.

PRECIOUS PRAYERS

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

“And the person with tzaraas in whom there is the affliction... he is to call out, ‘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... he is to call out, ‘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 the affliction... he is to call out, 'Impure! Impure!'" (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 ס 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 manyfold. 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).

HOLINESS IN UNITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He shall stay in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp." (13:46)

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 Wisniewsky

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 Wisniewsky

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

CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

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

Parashas Tazria discusses the *tzaraas/nega* (lesion) that affects clothing (13:45-59). The Gemara explains that *tzaraas* is most often caused by speaking negatively about others (*lashon hara*) but can also be induced by stinginess, a derivation of the word *tzaraas* being *tzar*, "narrow." The Torah discusses that the *Kohen* observes that the lesion doesn't change its "*ayin*" after being washed (13:55). Typically an "*ayin*" is an eye, but what does an eye have to do with a lesion found on clothing?

The Chiddushei HaRim explains that there is a double meaning for the word "*ayin*." It means eye, but the *ayin* is also the last letter used in the word *nega*. It turns out that if you instead move the letter *ayin* in *nega* to the beginning of the word, it forms the word *oneg*, which means "joy." The Torah tells us that if people don't also shift their perspectives after removing the lesion, they and their clothes remain unclean. Luckily, turning stinginess into joy requires only a slight adjustment to our perspective and has the effect of reorienting us entirely.

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.

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.

PROACTIVE POSITIVITY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"But if the garment or the warp or the woof or any leather utensil had been laundered and then the affliction left them, it shall be washed again and it shall become pure." (13:58)

When a lesion or impurity on a garment diminishes after washing, the garment needs to be washed a second time before being deemed pure (13:58). What is the significance of washing garments twice?

Rav Hirsch comments that two washings are required because the first rids the garment of impurity, while the second purifies it. Rav Moshe Feinstein adds that these cleanings apply to people as well. We can understand from these explanations that being pure and good doesn't mean not doing bad things, just like having a positive life doesn't mean that nothing negative happens. Having a good life or being a good person is not the absence of negatives but a commitment to proactively increase our positive efforts.

TOTAL IMMERSION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"But if the garment or the warp or the woof or any leather utensil had been laundered and then the affliction left them, it shall be washed again and it shall become pure." (13:58)

From the fact that a garment needs to be immersed in a *mikvah* (ritual pool) even after it has been physically rid of all trace of *tzaraas* teaches us that there are two stages of repentance:

The first stage - corresponding to the disappearance of *tzaraas* from the garment - is to admit having sinned, acknowledge that we regret having done so, and resolve not to do so again. This rids us of the effect of the sin and procures G-d's forgiveness.

However, it is not enough that G-d simply forgives us; we want to be restored to His favor, as well. The second stage, therefore - corresponding to the immersion of the garment in a *mikvah* - is to recommit ourselves to G-dly living, this time with greater dedication than before. We do this by vigorously immersing ourselves in the study of the Torah. This restores us to G-d's favor. Ideally, we should intensify our love of G-d, for if our recommitment is motivated by love, we will merit G-d's favor even greater than before. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, p. 99) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

CLOTHES MAKES THE MAN

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"This is the law of the tzaraas affliction, a garment of wool or linen, or the warp or the woof, or any leather utensil; to declare it pure or to declare it impure." (13:59)

Spiritually, our "garments" are our faculties of thought, speech, and action, which "clothe" - i.e., enable us to express - our intellect and emotions.

We are born with intrinsic intellectual and emotional capacities; it is very difficult to change these. In contrast, it is easy to control our manner of thinking, talking, and acting - as simple as changing our clothing.

By sanctifying our "garments" - i.e., thinking and talking about holy things and using our limbs for holy actions - we can gradually remake our intellect and emotions, as well. Having holy ideas - seeing the world through G-d's eyes and ears, so to speak - becomes second nature. Similarly, having holy emotions - liking or avoiding things based on their conduciveness to holy, wholesome, and positive living - also becomes second nature.

By choosing how we "dress" ourselves, then, we can ultimately influence what kind of person we become. (Tanya, chapter 14, 20a-b) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

HAFTORAH

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.

TO VIEW OUR PREVIOUS POSTS, CHECK OUT:

WWW.SHIURENJOYMENT.COM/CHIZUK-WITH-REBBENACHMAN/