

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Metzora

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LIVING THE GOOD LIFE

Kochav MiYaakov

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification..." (14:2)

Ha'Metzora (the metzora) alludes to Ha'Motzi ra (he who spreads evil reports about others). (Talmud)

This is told of a peddler who used to travel through the towns near Sepphoris, crying out: "Who wants to buy the elixir of life?" Huge crowds would draw around him. Rabbi Yannai was sitting and explaining (the Torah) in his room, and heard the peddler's calls. So the rabbi called to him: "Come here and sell it to me." The peddler responded: "Neither you nor people like you require what I have to sell." The rabbi pressed him and so the peddler went to him and took out a Tehillim and showed him the *pasuk* that reads, "Who is the man that desires life?" and what is written immediately after: "Keep your tongue from evil" (Ps. 34). Rabbi Yannai responded with amazement: "All my life I've read this *pasuk* and didn't understand how this was to be explained, until this peddler came and made it clear to me." (Midrash Rabbah)

The peddler who went about peddling cures and remedies demonstrated to people that keeping one's tongue from evil gossip is in itself a remedy ensuring health and a happy life. By not gossiping, one avoids quarrels, hatreds, worry and intrigue - in short, all those things that endanger health, irritate the nerves and shorten life.

Before he met the peddler, Rabbi Yannai had interpreted the *pasuk* "Who is the man that desires life?" as referring to life in the World to Come, meaning that one who could keep from evil gossip on earth would receive one's reward in Heaven. It had never occurred to the rabbi that it might refer to a reward to come during life on earth. It was the peddler who explained that guarding one's tongue from speaking evil was not only a good deed, deserving of reward in the World to Come, but also an aid to health, prolonging our life on earth by helping us avoid those worries and excitements that undermine health and hasten death.

POSITIVE THINKING

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification..." (14:2)

The Gemara (Arachin 16a) lists several reasons why one would contract the disease of *tzaraas*. The list almost exclusively mentions *mitzvos* affecting other people rather than those which deal only with Hashem, and they each share one common denominator - causing harm to a fellow Jew.

One may think that if he is not speaking *lashon hara* about someone, or if he is not jealous over his friend's success, then he is acting in accordance with what Hashem wants from him. While it is certainly true that Hashem forbids *lashon hara* and other forms of hurting people, nevertheless, merely refraining from or avoiding these feelings is not enough. We must actively look for the good in people and see how we can improve their lives.

This is one of the "fundamental paths of kindness" according to Rabbeinu Yona, who stresses that everyone is obligated to think of good advice that can benefit his fellow and make his life better (Shaarei Teshuva 3:54).

One person who exemplified this precept was Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivas Mir, who suffered from severe Parkinson's disease. He once related that at the times when he had absolutely no energy to learn, he would just lie down and spend those moments thinking of different ways to encourage others in their learning!

STAY IN YOUR LANE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the Kohen..." (14:2)

In both Parshas Tazria and Parshas Metzora, the Torah describes the procedure and requirement of having a *kohen* examine a person's body, clothing and house when a suspicion of *tzaraas* arises.

The Mishnah in Negaim (2:5) states: A *kohen* can evaluate and determine if someone else has *tzaraas*, however, a *kohen* who notices what might be *tzaraas* on himself cannot make the determination for himself. Instead, he must ask a different *kohen* to decide how to proceed.

The Baalei Mussar derive an additional lesson from the words of the Mishnah. The word *nega* can mean “affliction” or “plague,” as it does here, but it can also mean “blemished” or “biased.” Based on this, the *Baalei Mussar* suggest that the Mishnah is teaching us that a person is always able to see the blemishes and biases of others but is incapable of seeing their own weaknesses.

In life, we are quick to judge categorically and assume wrongdoing based on what we observe. We believe that we have the correct perspective in determining if other people’s behavior and conduct are up to par. The *Baalei Mussar* are teaching us that instead of jumping to criticize and judge others, we must make sure that we have an accurate picture and assessment of who we are.

We should take the necessary steps to ensure that we are doing what we should be doing and not focus on what others need to improve upon. Let’s worry less about the weaknesses of others and focus on making sure we do what’s right.

NEVER TOO LATE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the Kohen...” (14:2)

Tzaraas was usually caused by the sin of slander or by exhibiting haughtiness. Someone afflicted with *tzaraas* was banished from society altogether, even from the outermost domains of the camp (or - after the Jewish people settled in the Land of Israel - the person’s city or town). This banishment was meant to teach the person that the behavior that brought on his affliction is the very antithesis of holiness.

Such a person, having fallen so low on the ladder of spirituality, might lose the motivation to re-enter the domain of holiness. For this reason, the Torah instructs us that the person afflicted with *tzaraas* is to be brought to the *kohen* to begin his purification process even against the afflicted person’s will (see Sifsei Kohen and Kli Yakar on this verse). G-d decreed that we must extricate him from his situation even when he is too despondent to take the initiative to do so himself.

Thus, we see that G-d promises us that He will not give up even on such individuals. Taking this cue, we too should never give up on our fellows - even if they have given up on themselves - persisting in our efforts to awaken their dormant spirituality, optimism, and desire for holiness and joy. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, pp. 101-102; *ibid.*, vol. 18, pp. 139-140) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

UNAVOIDABLE TEST

Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

“This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the Kohen...” (14:2)

HaMetzora (the *metzora*) alludes to *HaMotzi ra* (he who spreads evil reports about others). (Gemara)

The law pertaining to one who spreads an evil report is that the *tzaraas* lesions come as the result of evil gossip. (Midrash and Gemara)

Since evil gossip is considered a serious transgression, it is not only forbidden to speak ill of a person, but the Sages even warn us against spreading someone’s praise for fear that while extolling a person’s virtues we may also reveal the person’s shortcomings.

The Sages warn us against making any statement that may even verge on evil gossip. Thus, one should not say that a fire is always burning in the hearth of so-and-so [thereby indicating their hospitality], because that could be construed by others to imply that the person is living on too lavish a scale.

Since even such talk is regarded as verging on evil gossip, the Sages admit that it is difficult to guard against it and that almost every person becomes guilty of this sin every day. (Compare with: “There are three things that a person can never avoid: [one of them is]... association with evil gossip.”)

OUTREACH VIA IN-REACH

Baal Shem Tov

“This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the Kohen...” (14:2)

All Jews are truly one. Therefore, our Sages state, “Who is wise? He who learns from each person.” We can even learn from a wicked individual whom we observe acting in sin.

What can we possibly learn from such an encounter?

Seeing that all Jews are truly one entity, we must realize that we harbor a degree of the same sinfulness we observed in our fellow Jew, albeit in an infinitely more subtle form. We must then strive to correct the subtle flaw within ourselves, and as a result of Jewish unity, our positive effort will cause our fellow Jew to become purified and break free from his wickedness.

This is the deeper meaning of the Torah’s introduction to the laws of the *metzora*. The term *metzora* can be read as *motzi ra*, “he who extracts evil” from his fellow Jew. When is one able to accomplish this? “On the day of his purity,” referring to the day that the person who observed the evil purifies *himself*. Purging himself of subtle wrongs causes his fellow’s more intense evil to be extracted and removed.

ODYSSEY OF REDEMPTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the kohen." (14:2)

The condition of *tzaraas* and its purification allude to exile and redemption, respectively (see Rashi on Sanhedrin 98a-b). This means that just as the condition of *tzaraas* was followed by the process of purification, living our lives according to the Torah's instructions during exile will lead organically into the Redemption. In other words, the Redemption will simply be the full flowering of the Torah and its commandments that we studied and performed during our exile. The Torah of the Messianic future will be the same Torah we now possess, but its innermost dimensions will finally be fully revealed to us. Similarly, we will continue to observe the Torah's commandments in the Messianic future, but we will do so in their fullest scope, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In reading about the odyssey of the individual afflicted with *tzaraas* and the process of his or her redemption from social isolation - "exiled" from society - we are at the same time reading about both our own personal odysseys of spiritual crisis and redemption, as well as our collective odyssey through our exile, as we work toward our final Redemption. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

LASTING IMPRESSION

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification..." (14:2)

The Shem MiShmuel quotes the Alshich in asking why the Torah doesn't simply state "*zos toras ha'metzora* - this is the law of the *metzora*." Why does the Torah add the word "*tehiyeh*," which means "will be," as if to imply that the laws of *metzora* will be in the future and not only in the present?

The Shem MiShmuel explains based on the insight of his father, the Sochatchover Rebbe, that a person is stricken with *tzaraas* as a result of arrogance. The purpose of the excommunication and isolation punishment is to humble and ground the individual. The Torah states, "*os tehiyeh toras ha'metzora*" - "This will be the law of the *metzora*" (meaning in the future), to teach us that even after a person leaves their state of *tzaraas*, they should continue to maintain the level of humility that they achieved from the affliction as they move forward.

One of the most dangerous character traits we all contend with is arrogance. It can complicate relationships, cloud our decision-making abilities, and have terribly adverse effects on our spiritual growth. Let us reflect on the teaching of the Shem MiShmuel and ensure that we rid ourselves of arrogance and instead recognize that Hashem, and only Hashem, is the sole Source and Address for our needs and successes. This attitude will help us lead happier and more meaningful lives.

GENERATING POSITIVE ENERGY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification..." (14:2)

The Hebrew word for a person afflicted with *tzaraas* (*metzora*) can be seen as a contraction for the Hebrew phrase for "slanderer" (*motzi shem ra*), which literally means "someone who gives [someone else] a bad name." This reflects the fact that *tzaraas* afflicted people whose hidden evil surfaced in spontaneous harmful gossip and slander.

Good deeds generate positive energy and misdeeds generate negative energy. Therefore, when we set out to repair the damage caused by a misdeed, we also need to neutralize the negative energy it generated. Gossip and slander result from using the power of speech excessively. Therefore, the way to rectify the damage they caused is by excessive speech in a positive way - by studying the Torah (which should be done out loud). This draws positive, holy energy into the world.

We are taught that the Torah's letters are all "names" of G-d - i.e., channels through which Divine energy enters the world. Thus, the positive energy that is brought into the world through the study of the Torah counteracts the negative energy that produces *tzaraas*, replacing the destructive, evil "bad names" with constructive, Divine "names." - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

POWERFUL WINDS

Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification..." (14:2)

The verse states, "For lo, He Who forms the mountains and creates the wind and declares to man what is his conversation" (Amos 4:13). The Sages comment: "Even trifling talk between a husband and his wife will be recalled to the man at the hour of judgment" (Chagigah 4).

What connection is there between the *pasuk* from Amos and the Sages' comment? One may think: Of what importance are my words? A word has no substance, and can not be seen or touched.

To him the prophet says: "For lo, He Who forms the mountains" - G-d, Who has created the magnificent and towering mountains, surely the most powerful mass on earth; "and creates the wind" - is also He Who has made the wind that, though it has no substance and can neither be seen with the eye nor perceived with the sense of touch, is capable of eroding even the strongest of mountains. "And declares to man" - This fact alone should impress upon us most forcefully; "what is his conversation" - the importance of every word that passes our lips. It is true that words have no substance and are invisible but, like the wind, they can cause entire worlds to crash.

SPIRITUAL TREASURES

Rabbi Yaakov Klein

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the kohen. And the kohen shall go forth out of the camp..." (14:2-3)

In Parshas Tazria, Hashem tells Moshe that when the Jews enter the Holy Land, He will place צרעת on their houses. Rashi explains that, unlike other forms of צרעת, this plague was not a response to human sin. Rather, this affliction would be sent from heaven for the benefit of the homeowner. When a Jew would approach the *kohen* and announce, "Something like a plague has appeared on my house," the stricken abode would be rendered impure and closed up for a seven-day period, after which the stained bricks would be removed. Because the *tzaraas* appeared on a section of the wall behind which the Emorites had hidden money and other valuables, the removal of the bricks would reveal treasures that would then become possessions of the homeowner. According to the Ramban, this plague was entirely unnatural; its appearance guaranteed the presence of a treasure behind the plagued bricks.

In the year 1940, the holy Piasezner Rebbe Hy'd asked the following question to his battered congregants in the Warsaw Ghetto: If the sole purpose of this form of צרעת was to reveal the hidden treasure as explained by Rashi and accentuated by the Ramban, why did the house need to be deemed impure and sealed off for seven days? Why couldn't the *kohen* simply tear down the wall straight away? Chazal teach that whatever happens to a person is for his ultimate spiritual betterment - "כל מה דעביד רחמנא" - "לטב עביד."

This means that all trials and tribulations of the human experience are intended to aid us in our personal journey toward closeness with the Master of the world. While not always easy to apply, it is simpler for us to understand how this rule manifests in day-to-day annoyances such as a missed bus, a broken-down car, a failed business endeavor, or an illness. However, when the difficulty we encounter is religious in nature, it becomes far more difficult for us to understand how this could possibly be heaven-sent in order to aid our growth.

Unable to pray in a *shul* or visit the *mikvah*, forced to enter Succos without *dalet minim*, and having no menorah to light on the first night of Chanukah - these tragic difficulties seem to impede our growth, trampling on our avodas Hashem and stomping it into oblivion. Can there be a glimmer of light even here, in the spiritual desolation of a Warsaw Ghetto, in the crippling conditions of challenges that prevent us from serving Hashem in the way our souls yearn to serve Him?

The holy Aish Kodesh teaches that the answer is to be found in the laws regarding צרעת on a house. If the *kohen* were to break down the wall immediately after the צרעת appeared, this would perhaps teach that everything, even leprosy, is for the purpose of revealing a hidden treasure.

However, the introduction of impurity into the process broadens the lesson dramatically: even heaven-sent impurity manifest in impassible spiritual obstacles that lead to a treasure in the end.

This is why instead of saying "A plague appeared on my house," the homeowner would say "Something like a plague..." As limited human beings, we are not privy to understanding the true nature of things - even those things that seem unjust and negative. All we can ever say is "Something like...", acknowledging that despite how a given situation may appear, we believe it is ultimately for the good.

One day we will understand that even a crisis represented by the inability to properly serve Hashem itself paves the way for the most awesome, incomprehensible spiritual treasure.

LIVE RECORDING IN PROGRESS

Dubno Maggid

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the kohen. And the kohen shall go forth out of the camp..." (14:2-3)

People who spread gossip usually underestimate the power of the spoken word. They reason: "All I did was talk; I haven't done my neighbor any harm." But if they were to become aware of the enormous power inherent in human speech, and realize that the gossip they have spread about their neighbor will bring Divine condemnation not only on themselves but upon their victims, they would surely be careful to refrain from evil gossip.

The Sages say (Midrash Tetzvi): "Don't say, 'Indeed, I am spreading gossip, but not a soul knows about it.' For the Holy One, blessed be He, says: Know that I am sending out an angel who will stand near you and record every word you say about your neighbor."

We know, therefore, that any word a human being utters endures and will reach up into the highest places in Heaven. It follows that anyone who spreads gossip must be given an impressive demonstration of the importance of speech. For this reason someone who spreads gossip is stricken with *tzaraas*, and must then be brought to the *kohen*. At that time, the person will discover that their fate is entirely dependent on one single word to be uttered by the *kohen*.

Until the *kohen* pronounces the word "impure," a *metzora* is not impure, even if all can see that he has been stricken.

Conversely, even if all who see the *metzora* think he has been cured, he remains impure until such time as the *kohen* utters the word "pure."

This should teach one who talks ill of one's neighbor how powerful each word uttered is, and one will no longer allow one's tongue to wag.

TAKING THE FIRST STEP

Shem MiShmuel

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the kohen. And the kohen shall go forth out of the camp..." (14:2-3)

Implicit in this *pasuk* is the thought that those stricken with *tzaraas*, even while still outside the camp, should be impelled by their own free will to repent and go to the *kohen* to be purified. It is only in response to their personal resolve to become pure that they should be taken to the *kohen* and brought closer to the state of purity.

Only after a *metzora* has decided to take positive action leading to repentance and purity, shall "the *kohen* go forth out of the camp" to purify him. We must rise to action ourselves before we can expect action from Above.

PUSHING AND PULLING

Rabbi Yaakov Klein

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the kohen. And the kohen shall go forth out of the camp. The kohen shall look and behold! - the plague of tzaraas has been healed from the metzora." (14:2-3)

Rashi, the Chizkuni and the Kli Yakar explain: The *metzora* may be pronounced "*tahor*" during the day, not at night. The entire process of his purification takes place during a single day. The Torah refers to the day of the *metzora's* being brought to the *kohen* (prior to his healing and the purification ritual) as "the day of his purification," because it is metaphorically addressing his decision to commit to a lifestyle of goodness and "drawing close to the *kohen*," to study the paths of righteousness.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains: Hashem is constantly pulling the strings behind the scene, working to bring His lost sheep back to the flock. However, our experience is a bit different. From our side of things, it appears as if our spiritual gains are a result of our own efforts; as if we are drawing Hashem toward us instead of being pulled, effortlessly, into His warm embrace. But in truth, our efforts to return to Hashem in *teshuvah* are just that: "*teshuvah*" - an answer to His call of infinite concern that echoes deep within the recesses of our souls.

The *tzaddik* teaches that our *pesukim* present these two aspects.

The first *pasuk* reveals the truth from Hashem's perspective: והובא אל הכהן - The *metzora* is truly being pulled toward the "*Kohen*," a reference to Hashem.

The second *pasuk* tells of how it appears from the sinner's perspective: ויצא הכהן אל מחוץ למחנה - Hashem arranges our return in a way that makes it seem to be the fruit of our own labor.

MOVEMENT FROM WITHIN

Rabbi Aryeh Dachs

"And the kohen shall go forth out of the camp. The kohen shall look and behold! - the plague of tzaraas has been healed from the metzora." (14:3)

The author of the sefer Cheshbon HaNefesh introduces his work with a sort of poetic visual. He describes observing a valley on a riverside filled with tall reeds. The reeds all stand erect and unmoving, at least until a slight breeze blows and the reeds flow together with the breeze. He writes that people usually act the same way. We don't like to make changes; we more or less stay the same until something on the outside moves us to act one way or another.

Most of Parashas Tazria revolves around the identification and treatment of one who is afflicted with *tzaraas*. The next parashah, Metzora, addresses the purification process of the afflicted being physically cured from his *tzaraas*. Our Rabbis teach that one becomes afflicted with *tzaraas* when they act in a haughty nature, specifically when they speak ill, *lashon hara*, about other Jews. Before the *tzaraas* is cured, the one afflicted must quarantine himself outside the community in a way that is clearly designed to humble the afflicted. He can only begin the process of purifying and reintegration after the *tzaraas* diminishes, which is when we can be confident that he is now a changed man, humbled and ready to rejoin the community.

The verse in the beginning of Parashas Metzora teaches that after the afflicted is healed from his *tzaraas*, there is still a process he must undergo before he is allowed back into the camp. The process begins with the *Kohen* observing that "Behold! The *tzaraas* has been healed from the *tzarua*." However, the last part of the verse, "from the *tzarua*" is not easy to define. Simply, it means from the one afflicted with *tzaraas*. But this reading is difficult because "from the *tzarua*" is redundant. Of course the subject is the one who was afflicted! Who else would be healed from the *tzaraas*?

The Chasam Sofer explains that the words "from the *tzarua*" are included to emphasize that the healing and the humbling came as a result of his affliction. The process worked. He is healed physically and also healed internally; he is chastened. However, he was clearly unable to effect the change on his own. He needed the "help" or nudge from the *tzaraas* to make the transformation. His recovery was specifically from the *tzaraas* and therefore less than ideal. The Chasam Sofer explains that it is important to emphasize this here; immediately before we are introduced to the next part of the purification process where he must perform the ritual with the two doves, and be sprinkled with the cedar, crimson thread, hyssop, blood, and water mixture. He was humbled by the seclusion, he evolved, and is a new man. Yet, he still requires further purification. Why? Because he was only moved to transform by external stimuli: The *tzaraas*.

Like the reeds by the riverbank, we often wait for, and depend on, inspiration from outside sources to make internal changes, even ones we recognize that we may need. The Chasam Sofer teaches that the most powerful moves we make are when we are compelled to change on our own, from within.

COSTLY GOSSIP

Kesav Sofer

"This shall be the law [lit., the Torah] of the metzora on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the kohen. And the kohen shall go forth out of the camp..." (14:2-3)

If it is the *kohen* who must go forth, why is it stated in the *pasuk* immediately after "he shall be brought to the kohen"?

The Sages teach us that any credit gossipers may have received in the past for the amount of Torah they studied and for the good deeds they performed are subtracted from their account and "added" to the account of anyone about whom they have spread the gossip.

According to the Sages, the Hebrew verb "*ve'huvah*" may be rendered not as "he shall be brought" but as "it shall be brought," referring not to the *metzora* but to Torah study.

It is to this explanation that the first part of *pasuk* 2 alludes: "This shall be the Torah of the *metzora*..." The study in which the *metzora* engaged in the past must be noted and credited to the *kohen's* account, with "the kohen" symbolizing any righteous person about whom the *metzora* may have spread evil gossip, for it is the righteous - the leaders who are described as the "kohanim" of G-d - who have always been the most likely targets for gossip and calumny.

SPIRITUAL HEALING

Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Goodman

"The kohen shall look and behold! - the plague of tzaraas has been healed from the metzora." (14:3)

Logically, the phrase should have read, "the leper has been healed of his leprosy" [instead of saying that the *tzaraas* has been healed]!

Rav Shmuel di Uzida, offers an explanation in the introduction to his famous Midrash Shmuel Al Pirkei Avos. The Jewish People recognize that with all the efforts that a doctor may make to heal an infirm person, the ultimate healing is from G-d. So often, people who suffer serious illness which causes them to undergo complete repentance of a profligate life, find that they are miraculously healed. Indeed this is why in the summer months, when various illnesses increase, we are urged to carefully study and put into practice the beautiful teachings of the Ethics of the Fathers, as a spiritual aid for our physical well-being.

This point may help explain the curious wording of the Torah regarding the healing of a leper. This man has been sent out of the camp into isolation. We might have imagined that it would be best for him to be in the fresh air and sunlight, instead of sitting in the "blackness" of isolation. However, in his situation, he must reflect on his loose tongue and come to comprehend the meaning of his punishment.

When the *kohen* comes to examine him and sees that indeed he has learned his lesson, he can confirm that "the plague of leprosy has been healed" and the source of that healing was not a medical doctor but "from the leper himself," whose spiritual rebirth directly caused the leprosy to vanish.

LEAVING CAMP GROUNDS

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"And the kohen shall go forth out of the camp..." (14:3)

Parshas *Metzora* outlines the procedure by which a *metzora* who has been cured of his *tzaraas* infection regains his status of *tahara* (purity) so he can return to his city from which he had been banished. At the beginning of this process, the Torah commands, ויצא הכהן אל מחוץ למחנה - the *kohen* must go outside the city to inspect the *metzora* and determine that the *metzora's* infection has indeed healed.

The Tolna Rebbe shelita notes the comment of the Midrash in a separate context that the word הנה implies שמחה, something that is done joyfully. Applying this connotation of הנה to our *pasuk*, the Tolna Rebbe concludes that the Torah requires the *kohen* to go outside the city to the *metzora* happily, with joy and enthusiasm. The *kohen* is told to leave the sacred, spiritual environment of the *Beis HaMikdash* and חוץ למחנה go, outside the camp, to help a sinner who had been stricken with *tzaraas* because of his wrongdoing, compelling him to live in solitude and isolation far away from other people. And the *kohen* is expected to go there joyously, excited over the fact that the *metzora* has been cured.

The Tolna Rebbe explains that the *kohen* is to feel such genuine love and affection for every Jew, even the lowly *metzora* banished outside the camp, that he should rejoice over the opportunity to go חוץ למחנה, to help him and bring him back. A leader's love for his fellow Jews is manifest not inside the "Beis HaMikdash," not when everything is pure and pristine, but specifically when there is a need to leave the serenity of the Mikdash, to help the fellow Jew struggling with difficult problems and complex situations.

The Torah does not permit the *kohen* to remain in the *Beis HaMikdash*, in the "ivory tower." He is instructed to go, when necessary, חוץ למחנה to help those who find themselves distant from that tower, and he is told to do so not begrudgingly, but joyously, out of a deep sense of love, affection and devotion to each and every one of his fellow Jews.

There are many people today who are situated חוץ למחנה, outside the “camp,” who feel rejected or distanced from the community. It might be an *aguna* who feels abandoned and disillusioned. It might be somebody who has chosen not to follow the path of traditional observance, and feels estranged by the community.

It is our responsibility to go to these and others like them חוץ למחנה to lend them a hand, to show them support, to extend friendship. And we are to do so בשמחה, joyfully, fueled by our deep sense of unconditional love for all our precious fellow Jews.

We are not entitled to remain comfortably inside the מחנה, in our *shuls* and *batei midrash*. Our love for every Jew must lead us to enthusiastically go חוץ למחנה to connect with those who, for whatever reason, find themselves outside the community, to show them affection and lend them support.

EVERYBODY NEEDS SOMEBODY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And the kohen shall go forth out of the camp. The kohen shall look and behold! - the plague of tzaraas has been healed from the metzora.” (14:3)

Mashal: For years, every morning after *Shacharis*, R’ Chaim Kanievsky zt’l would visit his mother, Rebbetzin Pesha Miriam, who lived nearby. Often she would insist on making him a small breakfast and whenever his father, the Steipler Gaon zt’l, was there, they would share Torah thoughts.

When the rebbetzin passed away in 1973, her daughter who had been widowed at a young age, moved in with her father to tend to his daily needs. R’ Chaim then stopped his daily morning visit.

A few weeks later, the Steipler commented to R’ Chaim, “I, too, appreciated your daily visit.”

It was an off-the-cuff remark, but R’ Chaim perceived the twinge of pain his father felt when he realized that his son had curtailed his daily visits.

R’ Chaim understood that a person bereft of a close family member needs other family members for strength and assurance.

For the next 12 years until the Steipler Gaon passed away, R’ Chaim visited his father every single day.

Nimshal: Every person, even one carrying the burdens of thousands, yearns for a bond with close ones.

When the *metzora* is forced to sit outside the camp for seven days, his punishment is keenly felt since he experiences the painful loneliness that separates him from his family and the rest of *Klal Yisrael*. Thus, the unbearable solitude will compel him toward sincere repentance.

HEALING FROM WITHIN

Arizal

“The kohen shall look and behold! - the plague of tzaraas has been healed from the metzora.” (14:3)

Why doesn’t the text read: “And behold, if he has been healed from the plague of *tzaraas*” [instead of saying that the *tzaraas* has been healed]?

A leprous condition due to natural causes is aggravated by gloom, melancholia, and loneliness. Logically, then, an improvement in the condition could be brought about by making the victims go among people and letting them be in good company in order to dispel their depression. In the case of the *tzaraas* described in Vayikra, however, the Torah explicitly stipulates that the *metzora* must be left alone outside the camp. This is to teach us that, in this case, the affliction is not due to natural causes but was supernaturally ordained as a punishment for sin. Therefore, only if a *metzora* repents of his transgression will he be cured, even if he sits in seclusion.

This is the thought conveyed by the text: “And the *kohen* shall go forth out of the camp and behold,” if he will see that “the plague of *tzaraas* has been healed from the *metzora*,” despite the fact that the *metzora* was isolated - and normally isolation could be expected to aggravate the condition - the *kohen* will understand that the cure did not come about by a natural process but “from the *metzora*,” from within the *metzora*. In this condition, the cure depends entirely on the victim. Since a *metzora*’s own evil deeds have brought the plague upon him, a *metzora* can only be cured by repentance.

SONG BIRDS

Rebbe Nachman

“Then the kohen shall command to take for the person being purified two live, clean birds, cedar wood and scarlet hyssop.” (14:4)

Why must a leper bring two birds as a sacrifice? Leprosy is a punishment for the one who spoke slander. Our Sages teach: “Let the chattering birds come and effect forgiveness for the chattering person.” (Vayikra Rabbah 16:7)

These two live, clean birds are the source for the “voice of holiness,” which corresponds to the cherubs upon the Ark in the Sanctuary. The Ark is the source of prophecy; thus, the word *Chazan* (חזן, singer) is related to *Chazon* (חזון, vision - i.e., prophecy). When a person sings for the sake of G-d, he draws his song from the two live, clean birds and from the inspiration of the cherubs, the source of prophecy. This kind of music can inspire many others to serve G-d. But when a person is motivated to sing vulgar or profane songs, or songs for personal gain, then he draws his music from the “birds of impurity.” That kind of music can spiritually damage anyone who hears it.

HEALTHY HUMILITY

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"Then the kohen shall command to take for the person being purified two live, clean birds, cedar wood and scarlet hyssop." (14:4)

Rashi says that the sin of speaking *lashon hara* is a result of *gasus ruach* - haughtiness, and that is why an *eitz erez* - a cedar, is included as part of the atonement of the *metzora*.

The Sifsei Chachamim explains that the cedar tree is the highest of all the trees, and thus it represents haughtiness.

In the same manner, Rashi says that the hyssop is part of the atonement process because it represents the lowest of all trees. It represents the humility that would have acted as a deterrent from speaking *lashon hara* and will hopefully cause the speaker to avoid repeating the mistake in the future.

The Shem MiShmuel asks why we need cedar wood that reminds the transgressor of his past misdemeanors. He is trying to make amends and surely doesn't want the past rubbed in his face!

Second, this flies in the face of the principle of אין קטיגור נעשה סנגור - the accuser cannot become the defender. If the cedar represents that which caused him to sin, how can it be part of his atonement process?

The Shem MiShmuel cites his father, the Avnei Neizer, who said that there are two types of humility.

- There is a humility born as a result of the realization of man's lowliness when considered against the majestic magnificence of the Almighty.
- Then there is the humility when one is afflicted with poverty or depression that makes him feel worthless.

In neither case is one exhibiting any arrogance, but one type of humility is healthy and productive, while the other is only short-term, unhealthy and non-productive.

If my humility is a result of a warped impression of reality, then I need to be able to see the cedar wood.

I need to understand that as important as humility is, it must not be based on a misconception of who I am but on a realization of my real value.

I am like the cedar wood, and yet I am humble in the knowledge that I am nothing compared to the Almighty.

That is the reason why the cedar wood that represents haughtiness is included in the atonement process of the *metzora*.

The *metzora's* mistake is that as a result of arrogance, he spoke *lashon hara*.

From this mistake, he has to learn and undertake to be humble. But it is crucial that he undertakes humility in a healthy way - the way of the *erez* - with a clear picture of his talents, capabilities, and abilities, and at the same time be humble.

The lesson is an important one regarding humility. Having the right kind of humility does not mean to deny our talents and abilities, but rather to acknowledge that we are talented and unique. We have exceptional skills and gifts, but at the same time, we employ them with humility. (Rabbi Avraham Rivlin, *Iyunei Parashah*, p. 173)

PRE-OP INSTRUCTIONS

Alter of Kelm

"Then the kohen shall command to take for the person being purified two live, clean birds, cedar wood and scarlet hyssop." (14:4)

Studying Parshas Metzora is similar to visiting a doctor before an operation.

If the patient sees that the doctor requires a large amount of surgical instruments for the procedure, it will frighten him.

So too, the Torah gives us a long list of the items needed for the purification of the *metzora*; two living birds, pure and clean, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop. The Torah continues with all the necessary measures to cure the *metzora*. From this, one can perceive the gravity of *lashon hara*, and will be deterred from sinning.

TIME TO CONNECT

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Then the kohen shall command to take for the person being purified two live, clean birds, cedar wood and scarlet hyssop." (14:4)

Parashas Metzora describes the prescribed treatment for the *nega* of *tzaraas*, which includes two birds (one is killed, the other is freed), cedar wood, a scarlet thread, an *ezov* branch (hyssop), and a seven-day wait (14:4). Rabbi David Forman points out that the only other time *nega* is mentioned in the Torah is when G-d describes the preparation for the tenth plague with the *Korban Pesach* (Shemos 1:1). Similar to *tzaraas*, it includes an *ezov* branch, wood (door frames), and two birds/nations (one goes free, while the other perishes). Why does the process of purifying the *metzora* mirror that of the Pesach offering?

Rabbi Forman suggests that the Pesach offering was the first time that the Jewish family entity was created, one cohesive family unit as part of a nation. The person afflicted with *tzaraas* distanced themselves from the community by speaking slander and must be quarantined until they learn to honor both their family and their community.

As we head into Pesach, we join together with family, reconnect with our heritage, and teach our children about our history. Just like all the ingredients in purifying the afflicted and those of the *Korban Pesach* are items with life (wood/trees, branches, birds, etc.), so too must our family experience be filled with life, hope, and lessons from the past in order to inspire a better tomorrow.

PROPER SPEECH

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"Then the kohen shall command to take for the person being purified two live, clean birds, cedar wood and scarlet hyssop." (14:4)

Rashi says that tzaraas is a result of *lashon hara*, which is an act of unnecessary "twittering" of words, so the sacrifice that is brought are two "twittering" birds.

The Apirion asks that we can understand why it is necessary to bring birds to hint to the *metzora* that he is in this situation because he "twittered" like a bird, but why must he bring two? One should be enough to deliver that message.

The Apirion suggests that had the *metzora* only brought one bird, he would have thought that it is to atone for his loose lips, and thus from now on, he is going to be quiet and not talk! In that way, he will avoid any future transgressions of *lashon hara*.

Therefore, a second bird is brought that remains alive. This indicates to the *metzora* that while careless talk can cause destruction, positive words create life.

The *pasuk* (Mishlei 28:11) says, החיים והמות ביד הלשון - "Life and death are in the hand of the tongue," which means that speech has the power of life as well - to learn, speak words of Torah, perform *chesed* with speech, etc.

Hashem does not want us to be silent; He just instructs us how to use the power of our speech correctly.

Therefore, two birds are brought: one to remind the *metzora* that he is in his predicament because of his "twittering," i.e., his negative and harmful speech, and the second bird that is not killed but set free shows that we are supposed to speak, but only in a way that brings life through the learning of Torah and the observance of *mitzvos*. (Talelei Oros, p. 282)

STANDING HUMBLY TALL

Avnei Ezel

"Then the kohen shall command to take for the person being purified two live, clean birds, cedar wood and scarlet hyssop." (14:4)

The plague came as a punishment for arrogance. What is the remedy for healing? Let him, abandoning arrogance, regard himself as lowly as a worm and as hyssop. (Rashi)

If the purpose of this ceremony of purification is to have the *metzora* abandon arrogance, what is the function of the cedar wood, which symbolizes pride?

To teach the *metzora* the proper attitude. Humility and submission do not mean that the body must be bowed. They imply that inner spiritual humility or contriteness can be present even while the body stands erect and unbowed. As the Baal Shem Tov explains: "And all that stands before You shall bow" - one can bow even while one appears to be standing erect.

The cedar wood is used to teach sinners that they need not think they are required to go about bent over and cringing in abject humility. They can stand erect as a cedar and still be as "bent" and humble in spirit as hyssop.

POSITIVE POTENTIAL

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Then the kohen shall command to take for the person being purified two live, clean birds, cedar wood and scarlet hyssop." (14:4)

As part of his purification process, a *metzora* is required to bring a sacrifice of two birds. The Zohar explains that one bird was to atone for his evil speech and the other was to atone for the fact that he did not use his speech positively. Rav Yissocher Frand shlit'a explains that *lashon hara* is a grave sin, but the lost opportunity for *lashon tov*, positive speech, is a sin unto itself.

People are unaware of the astounding power of the tongue. Kind words can literally bring a person back to life! Not utilizing the great gift of the tongue for positive purposes is clearly sinful.

The word "lashon" comes from the root of the word "lash," which means to knead. Just as kneading is what brings together flour and water, allowing dough to be formed and eventually creating the finished product of a loaf of bread, so too, the mouth which contains the *lashon* is the connecting force between body and soul and allows a person to express his essence.

In our desire to praise and thank Hashem in the tefillah of *Nishmas Kol Chai*, we split ourselves into three categories: *Eivarim shepilagta banu* - "the body parts You divided us into"; *v'ruach u'neshamah shenafachta b'apeinu* - "the soul that You blew into our nostrils"; *v'lashon asher samta b'finu* - "the tongue that You placed in our mouths." Although the tongue is a part of the body like all the rest of the organs, it is still mentioned individually. Why? Because the tongue is a separate and fundamental entity. It connects body and soul. It is unique and has awesome power to bring out the greatness of man. If used negatively, the results are disastrous and tragic. If used positively, there is no limit to the heights we can achieve for ourselves, for those around us, and in our relationship with Hashem.

LIVING WATERS

Sichos Tzaddikim

"And the kohen shall command and one of the birds shall be killed in an earthenware vessel over spring water." (14:5)

Of all immersions, why does the Torah explicitly specify in this case that spring water is required?

The literal meaning of the Hebrew expression "*mayim chaim*" (spring water) is "living water." Since a *metzora* was lowly in his own eyes, there was reason to fear that he might become depressed.

For this reason, “living water” was required to refresh and revive him. He could only be revived and strengthened by the water of knowledge from the wellsprings of the Torah, which are called “living waters.”

ACTION REQUIRED

Meshech Chochmah

“He shall then sprinkle it seven times on the one to be purified of the eruption and effect the purification.” (14:7)

In verses 7 and 11 the text uses the reflexive rather than the passive inflection to refer to the *metzora*’s process of purification. In both instances a *metzora* is referred to as “he who is to purify himself” and not as “he who is to be purified.” This indicates that a *metzora* must do his part to become pure. He himself must seek to attain purity through repentance and appropriate conduct.

EVEN ONE SMALL STEP

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“On the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair - his head, his beard, and his eyebrows ... and he shall immerse his flesh in water, and become purified.” (14:9)

The final stage of the purification process for the *metzora*, involved the *Kohen* shaving every hair on his body with a razor (Rambam, Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas 11:1).

The Sefer HaChinuch writes that this act symbolized a completely fresh start - as if he was born anew - completely clean and pure. And just as his hair is about to start growing for the first time, so too, he can change his ways for the better and begin with a completely fresh slate.

The question can be asked though: It only takes a very short amount of time for hair to grow back, and similarly in real life, even after a comprehensive commitment to change, it is often just a matter of time before we succumb to our yetzer hara. After all, who can stay perfect forever? What good can such a short-term burst of inspiration achieve?

Rav Elimelech Biderman related a tragedy that happened involving two hikers who lost their bearings. Eventually they came upon train tracks, and knowing that they would eventually come to a populated area, followed the tracks. It had been a long time, and no train had passed, and they hadn’t seen anything that resembled a town or city. They concluded that the train tracks were not in use but decided anyway to continue to follow them. But first they would rest and gather strength. They both lay down and fell asleep with one of them resting on the tracks. Tragically, the train track was in fact still in use, and although the driver immediately saw someone lying on the track as he turned the corner, it was too late to stop the train in time. All he could do was sound his horn and pray that the person woke up in time. Unfortunately, he did not.

Rav Biderman concluded this sad tale with a question. How far did the hiker need to move in order to save his life? A mile? A meter? No. One inch is all it would have taken to put this man out of danger and allow him to live his life.

With this sad story, perhaps we can answer our question. Although it is true that hair grows back quite quickly, and a person’s behavior cannot remain perfect, nevertheless, that tiny step, or that short time where he has the chance to remove himself from a spiritually dangerous situation is all he may need to turn his life around.

Although we do not have the *metzora* process today, there are many instances where we gain a moment of clarity and come to regret our actions, or where we are struck by the thought that we could be doing better. It is for us to try our best to grab that moment and make a move - even just an inch. Nothing more may be necessary for now, but that inch will surely be the start of our journey to a new and improved life.

SHAVING AWAY SIN

Kli Yakar

“On the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair - his head, his beard, and his eyebrows...” (14:9)

The three principal transgressions punished with *tzaraas* are haughtiness, evil gossip, and an envious eye. Hence, in order to become clean again, a *metzora* must symbolically cleanse himself of these three sins.

He must shave all the hair off his head because he was haughty and wanted to be “at the head” of everything. Next, he must shave off his beard because it failed to guard his mouth, which it surrounds, from uttering evil gossip. Finally, he must shave his eyebrows that failed to keep his eye from envy.

DOOR TO REPENTANCE

Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

“And the kohen who purifies shall set the man who is to be purified and those [things] at the door of the Tent of Meeting.” (14:11)

Not in the court of the Beis HaMikdash, but in the Gate of Nicanor. (Rashi)

The Torah allowed the *metzora* a privilege extended to no other unclean person: namely, to stand at the Gate of Nicanor, which led to the *Beis HaMikdash* Court, and from there to extend his hand and foot into the Court in order to smear his fingers with the blood of the guilt-offering.

This was permitted him because he was repentant and had purified himself of his transgressions. Symbolically, a door was opened to him through which to “return,” as the Sages have said concerning repentant sinners: “The Holy One, blessed be He, opened a new entrance for them beneath the Throne of Glory so that they might return to Him.”

FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The kohen must take some of the blood..." (14:14)

As mentioned, the excess negative energy generated by the sins of gossip and slander is counteracted and overcome by studying the Torah "excessively"; this generates an excess of positive energy.

However, in order for our study of the Torah to indeed elicit Divine energy and infuse it into creation, we must study it with pure motives, namely, in order to fulfill G-d's will and disseminate Divine consciousness, rather than for personal interest or as an intellectual pursuit.

Therefore, just as a *kohen* had to officiate at the purification process of a person formerly afflicted with *tzaraas*, our study of the Torah must be overseen by our inner "*kohen*." The *kohen* in the Tabernacle (and later, in the holy Temple) personified total self-nullification to G-d; similarly, we should strive to study the Torah with a pure and humble heart. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 12, pp. 81-82) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

INTENDED USE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"The kohen must take some of the blood..." (14:14)

Purification of those afflicted with *tzaraas* involves placing blood from an offering on the afflicted person's ear, thumb, and big toe (14:14). Since the malady is associated with gossip, while it may make sense to apply blood to the ear that willingly heard gossip and to the toe that may have traveled to hear gossip, why the thumb? Why is the thumb included in the cleansing process?

The Gemara (Kesubos 5) explains that we were given fingers that are pointed like pegs so that we may place them in our ears to avoid hearing gossip. It is for this reason that the thumb has been included in the offering performed by the *Kohen*. The inclusion of fingers in the atonement process underscores the value of using everything at our disposal to be good, do good, and avoid the pitfalls around us.

GENTLE REBUKE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The kohen will thus effect atonement for him." (14:20)

Just as only a *kohen* can release a person from *tzaraas*, only a *kohen* can pronounce the verdict that someone is afflicted with this condition. This is because the *kohen* personifies the attribute of loving-kindness (*chesed*), and therefore, he will seek every possible legal loophole to avoid ostracizing the individual from society. By the same token, if the *kohen* has no choice but to pronounce the dreaded sentence against the individual, the person will feel in the *kohen's* words that the treatment he is about to undergo is an expression of G-d's loving-kindness, a way to bring him back to the proper path in life.

So too, whenever we must criticize or censure the behavior of others, we must be sure to make them feel that we are doing this only for the ultimate good that will come out of it, and that we have only their best interests at heart. (Hitva'aduyot 5714, vol. 2, pp. 179-180) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

POVERTY ATONES

Rabbi Shalom Schwadron

"If he [the afflicted person] is poor and cannot afford..." (14:21)

The reason that it is permissible for a poor man to bring a smaller sacrifice than a wealthy man, is that his poverty itself is an atonement.

PROPERLY EQUIPPED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If he [the afflicted person] is poor and cannot afford..." (14:21)

The offerings that someone afflicted with *tzaraas* has to offer up as part of his purification process are subject to his financial means.

This is an example of the principle that G-d asks of us only what we are capable of (Midrash Tanchuma, Naso 11; Bamidbar Rabbah 12:3). This holds true both regarding what He requires of us materially and what He requires of us spiritually.

The spiritual dimension of sacrifices is our G-d-given mission to elevate the physical world by sanctifying it, thereby bringing it "closer" to G-d. (The word for "sacrifice," *korban*, means "something brought close.") G-d requires us to fulfill this mission only to the maximum extent possible.

If it sometimes seems as if He is asking more from us than we are capable of, it only means that He is more aware of our strengths than we are ourselves, and is prodding us to live up to our fullest spiritual potential. (Hitva'aduyot 5756, vol. 1, p. 420) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

BALANCING ACT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"This is the law [lit., Torah] regarding someone suffering from a lesion of tzaraas..." (14:32)

The fact that the symptom of *tzaraas* was a white spot on the flesh indicates that *tzaraas* resulted when holy rapture is not balanced by an equal sense of humble commitment to our Divine mission. Divine rapture is an expression of our love of G-d, whereas humble devotion to His will is an expression of our fear of G-d and submission to His will. Love of G-d and fear of G-d are identified in Jewish mystical texts as the "right hand" and "left hand" of our soul, respectively. Thus, favoring one over the other upsets our spiritual balance.

Opposite forces can only be harmonized by using a third force that surpasses and encompasses them both - the study of the Torah. Studying the Torah with a sense of self-nullification to G-d enables us to rise above the limitations of logic and nature. We can harmonize the opposites of love and fear, and restore the healthy balance between them. This is another way in which the study of the Torah is the antidote for gossip and slander, bringing healing and harmony into the world. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

PROPER PERSPECTIVE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"This is the law [lit., Torah] regarding someone suffering from a lesion of tzaraas..." (14:32)

The Chiddushei HaRim notes that the word the Torah uses for "affliction - נגע" - has exactly the same letters as the word for "pleasure - ענג". Moreover, the word for pleasure has the letter "ע - Ayin" at the beginning, which itself is the Hebrew word for "eye - עין".

This alludes to the idea that the sole factor which determines whether we will suffer from our afflictions is how we use the "ayin" - how we use our eye - our perception.

For example, the trait of jealousy begins with a misuse of our eyes, and if not reined in by self-control, will constantly cause us affliction, because there will always be someone else who will inevitably have something that we do not. However, if we appreciate that Hashem has given us exactly what we need, not just to survive, but to attain *shleimus*, a degree of perfection in the world, we would never be jealous of what anyone else has, because what he has cannot help me fulfill my purpose in the world. To live like this, is living a life of true pleasure.

Nevertheless, practically, jealousy is a very difficult feeling to overcome, especially because it is such a natural instinct. So how do we deal with this feeling?

The Beis HaLevi answers that the ability to quash jealous thoughts is possible within every one of us.

He demonstrates this with an analogy of a man who is pursuing a certain desire. He is burning with desire for this item as he makes his way to acquire it. As he is walking towards his goal, his drive is only getting stronger and stronger. He gets closer and closer, but as he is about to reach what he is seeking, he slips on a patch of ice.

Suddenly he becomes fraught with fear that he is about to fall. In that split second, his desire becomes completely forgotten and the fire that was burning becomes totally extinguished.

Therefore, says the Beis HaLevi, after the Torah (Shemos 20:14) says "Do not be jealous," even if a person was even slightly afraid of the punishment for transgressing this law - just like the fear that he might fall on the ice - then he will never come to be jealous at all.

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as a possession, and I place a lesion of tzaraas upon a house in the land of your possession." (14:34)

Rashi tells us that this was a good thing. The Emorites had hidden their gold and silver in the walls of the houses (to prevent the Jews from getting it). It was only after the house had been destroyed that the treasures were found.

The Torah is eternal. This message is for all generations. When it seems that we are experiencing something terrible - whether it be regarding *parnassah*, *shidduchim*, children or health - we must remember that in the misfortune itself is hidden "treasures of gold and silver". We just need to uncover it.

CURE OF TORAH

Radomsker Rebbe

"This is the law [lit., Torah] regarding someone suffering from a lesion of tzaraas..." (14:32)

When one learns Torah for its own sake, that will provide the cure for the affliction.

IT'S ALL GOOD

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as a possession, and I place a lesion of tzaraas upon a house in the land of your possession." (14:34)

It states *ונתתי נגע צרעת בבית ארץ אחזתכם* "I will give *tzaraas* in the house..." *ונתתי* sounds like it is a gift. How is *tzaraas* a gift?

Rashi writes, "It is a good tiding for them that they will get *tzaraas*. During the forty years the Yidden were in the desert, the *Emoraim* hid gold in the walls of their homes, and due to *tzaraas*, these [treasures] will be found."

When *tzaraas* was detected in the walls of their homes, they were required to break open the walls, thereby finding the gold that the *Emoraim* hid there. Therefore, *tzaraas* is a gift.

This doesn't apply only to *tzaraas*. Whenever a person has a problem, he should know "ונתתי," that it is a gift from Hashem.

The Gemara (Nidah 31a) gives the following example:

Two people left their homes and headed to the port to catch a ship that was sailing overseas. They looked forward to the wealth they would earn on this important business trip.

However, one of the two men stepped on a thorn; he couldn't continue walking and missed the ship. He cursed and shouted, upset that he had lost out on this business opportunity.

Sometime afterward, he heard that the ship had sunk. Now he praised Hashem. He discovered “ונתתי” - that the problem he had (the thorn) was a gift from Hashem to save his life.

The Gemara says that this is the meaning of the *pasuk* (Yeshayah 12:1) “אודה' כי אנפת בי” I will thank You, for You were wroth with me.” We praise Hashem for His wrath and anger because, in retrospect, we discover how good it was. As the *pasuk* continues, “ישב אפך ותנחמני, Your wrath turns away, and You comfort me.” We find out that it was for our good.

The Gemara adds that this is also the translation of the *pasuk* (Tehillim 72:18) “עושה נפלאות גדולות לבדו”, “Hashem performs wonders alone.” Often, no one knows about the miracles that Hashem performs but Hashem, Himself. The Gemara says, “Even a *baal ha'nes* (a person who a miracle happened to him) isn't aware of the miracles.”

There's a Midrash that discusses *tzaraas* and connects this topic to the *pasuk* אך טוב לישראל, that Hashem does solely good for Yisrael. The Divrei Yisrael explains that this is because even when it doesn't appear to be good, it truly is. We can be sure that, in completely hidden ways, everything is for our good...

Hashem always performs miracles for us. Sometimes they are concealed, but everything that happens to us is Hashem's kindness.

INTRINSIC KINDNESS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as a possession, and I place a lesion of tzaraas upon a house in the land of your possession.” (14:34)

The Gemara (Yoma 11b) teaches us that the affliction of *tzaraas* came onto people's homes as a punishment for not sharing their possessions.

For example, if someone asked to borrow an item from a neighbor and was told that he does not have such an item when he really did, the home of the owner of that item would contract *tzaraas* and force him to empty all of his personal belongings outside, exposing his possessions - and his stinginess - to all.

One may ask why such a miraculous and severe punishment is warranted for someone who does not want to share his belongings with others. Is it such a terrible sin that he deserves to empty out the entire contents of his home and be publicly embarrassed?

Perhaps the answer can be found in the Gemara which relates that the trait of kindness is ingrained in the DNA of every Jew. In fact, it is such an integral part of our makeup that seeing someone who possesses this character attests to his lineage as a descendant of Avraham! Accordingly, we can suggest that since kindness is the very fabric of the Jewish People, this virtue needed to be safeguard in such a severe manner.

The truth of this Gemara came to light in a story related by Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein about Tom (not his real name), an American boy who grew up not knowing that he was Jewish.

In order to help pay his way through college, Tom started to work for a catering company. He developed a good relationship with the manager and confided in him that he was pained after every event when so much good food got thrown into the trash when there were so many needy people who would relish such a luxurious meal. With the manager's permission, all of the leftover food was collected, and Tom brought it to a local homeless shelter. In fact, Tom not only brought the food, but stayed to help serve it. After several weeks, Tom mustered the courage to approach the only person in the shelter who refused to eat from the delicious food, and who would not even make eye contact with him. “What have I done to you that you won't even look at me? And why won't you at least eat from the food that I bring?” asked Tom.

“I don't want anything to do with Jews nor their acts of kindness!” replied the man with disgust.

“Okaaaay,” said Tom, “but what's that got to do with me? I'm not Jewish. I've never even met a Jew.”

“Liar!” shouted the man as he stormed away.

Bewildered, Tom returned home that night and asked his parents if they had any connection to Judaism. His mother revealed that she was in fact Jewish, making him Jewish too. Shocked, Tom immediately started to research Judaism and his inquiries led him to a local Rabbi and then to Eretz Yisrael where he enrolled himself in a yeshivah. And at the time of relating this story, said Rav Zilberstein, he was absolutely thriving.

Assisting others in need is not only a pillar-stone of Judaism (Perkei Avos 1:2), it is the basis upon which Hashem created the world (Tehillim 83:3) and a way that we are able to act like Hashem (see Sotah 14a).

ELEVATING SETBACKS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as a possession, and I will place a lesion of tzaraas upon a house in the land of your possession.” (14:34)

Sincere repentance elevates us to degrees of Divine consciousness that we could not have attained otherwise.

Since *tzaraas* struck specifically people who seemingly had nothing to repent for, it enabled even these people to achieve the closeness to G-d normally reserved for people who have repented for some misdeed.

Although this held true of *tzaraas* in general, it was most clearly seen in the *tzaraas* of homes, where the sufferer was rewarded openly by suddenly acquiring the worldly wealth hidden in his walls. This physical windfall reflected the spiritual windfall that the person acquired: his newfound closeness to G-d.

This is how we should view any apparent misfortune or seeming setback in life. It is G-d's way of elevating us to a level of relationship with Him that we could not have reached on our own. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, pp. 107-114)
- Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

HIDDEN SPARKS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as a possession, and I place a lesion of tzaraas upon a house in the land of your possession." (14:34)

Rashi explains that this verse actually conveys good tidings, because the Amorites (one of the Canaanite nations that the Jewish people had dispossessed when they entered the Land of Israel) had concealed treasures in the walls of their homes. The walls stricken with *tzaraas* had to be demolished, and thereby these hidden riches were revealed.

The underlying principle is as follows: The primary joy that a person experiences comes from elevating Divine sparks through his service to G-d. When a person elevates these sparks, it is the inner dimension of the sparks that is raised, while their external aspects are discarded. It is from the discarded external husks - the repulsive waste product bound up with the holy spark - that the person's house becomes stricken by *tzaraas*.

[Even the most unholy of matters must have a spark of G-dliness within it that is responsible for its existence. These sparks have a lofty source, but have "fallen" and must be retrieved, refined, and elevated back to their source in holiness, a process known as "beirur ha'nitzozos," refinement of the sparks.]

When the Jews entered the Land of Israel, G-d commanded (Devarim 20:16), "You shall not allow any soul to live" regarding the seven nations occupying the land, because any remaining sparks to be elevated were in their homes rather than in the people. This is the deeper meaning of Rashi's comment that G-d conveyed glad tidings through this commandment, for there were treasures that were concealed in the walls of their houses, alluding to the Divine sparks. The "glad tidings" allude to the joy that comes mainly from our elevation of the Divine sparks that are embedded in physicality.

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Whoever's house it is, shall come and tell to the kohen, saying, 'Something like an eruption has appeared to me upon the house.'" (14:35)

If leprosy breaks out on the walls of a house too dark for a proper survey, the windows may not be opened to allow the light to enter, as it must be examined by its usual light. This is gleaned from the *pasuk*: "Like a lesion, it appeared to me on the house" - it must appear to the *kohen* as is,

without any outside light. Likewise, the Mishnah (Negaim 2:3) teaches: "The windows of a dark house may not be opened to examine its leprosy."

Metaphorically, this is a directive to the leaders of *Klal Yisrael* not to seek and expose the blemishes and shortcomings of the nation during a time of darkness, i.e. in exile, when the people have fallen to a low level of *mitzvah* observance.

One must always look for the benefit of the doubt. It is not the people's fault that they have sinned; it is a result of the pain and suffering that they have been forced to endure. (Iturei Torah)

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Whoever's house it is, shall come and tell to the kohen, saying, 'Something like an eruption has appeared to me upon the house.'" (14:35)

Rashi says that Hashem conveyed good tidings to *Klal Yisrael* by stating that the plague will afflict their houses: "Because the *Emoraim* (Canaanites) hid their wealth within the walls of their homes... through the plague (and its consequences) the house was demolished, and the treasure was found." The question is asked: why does the *pasuk* say "k'nega" - "like" a *nega*?

R' Klonymous Kalman zt'l of Piatetzna writes (Warsaw Ghetto, 1940): We know and believe that all that Hashem does is for our own good. However, at a time like now, when the afflictions are not just physical but even spiritual in nature, we wonder how can Hashem cause us such pain?

There is no *cheder* or *yeshivah* here for children to study Torah. There is no *shul* to pray in or a *mikvah*. Is it possible that all this is for our own good?

The answer is that everything that Hashem does is for our good. Sometimes, though, a person doesn't realize it and thinks that it is a "plague," while in truth, it only appears like a plague. This is the lesson of the impure house that must be closed for seven days. Even this was an affliction for the person's own good. Thus, the Torah says that the owner upon seeing it must say, "It appears like a plague" - not that it actually was a plague. We must bear in mind that Hashem only wants to do good for us.

HIDDEN TREASURES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The kohen must order that the stones upon which the lesion is be removed, and they must dispose of them outside the city, to a defiled place." (14:40)

Divine providence arranged that of all the Jews who entered the Land of Israel, the most righteous among them settled in the houses abandoned by the most depraved of the Canaanites.

It was specifically these Canaanites who, hoping to eventually drive out the Jews and return to their homes, hid their treasures in the walls of their houses. When *tzaraas* broke out on the walls of these houses, the new Jewish residents had to demolish the walls, and in so doing revealed the wealth that had been hidden within them.

Similarly, when Divine providence brings us in contact with people, places or circumstances that appear to be negative or unhealthy, we should realize that it is in order that we reveal the inner goodness that hides beneath the facade of their exterior. Yes, their outer negativity has to be rejected, just as the Canaanites had to be driven out of the Land of Israel. But their inner core is a repository of wealth that must be brought to the surface for the world's benefit. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, pp. 107-114; *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 249-250; *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 1016d) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

INSIDE AND OUT

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Whomever the zav touches without having rinsed his hands in the water shall immerse his garments and immerse himself in water, and he remains impure until the evening." (15:11)

The Torah discusses the purification requirements of a *zav* (a man that has an unnatural discharge), which includes washing the clothes, immersing in water, and waiting for sundown (15:1-7). The Torah then tells us that if the *zav* touches someone without first cleansing his hands, the touched one also becomes unclean (15:11). Why are we told that the culprit's hands are unclean when his entire body is unclean?

Rav Hirsch explains that hands represent external human activity, and their status reflects the status of the internal. The fact that one's exterior is contaminated indicates an internal issue that requires a cleansing of the entire body. Whether we work on our actions to help improve our attitude or work on our mindset to refine our interactions, the Torah asserts that our internal character and external expression should match.

REFINING MATERIALISM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"An earthenware vessel that the zav will touch shall be broken; and any wooden utensil shall be rinsed in water." (15:12)

Allegorically, the human being, formed from the dust of the earth (Bereishis 2:7; 3:19), is an earthenware vessel. Just as an earthenware vessel cannot be defiled by external contact with a source of defilement that does not move it, so is our inner Divine essence impervious to defilement by contact with matters external to it, i.e., the materialism of our physical world, which cannot move our Divine essence.

G-d created us as physical creatures with physical needs, and moreover, He created us such that we naturally enjoy fulfilling these needs. Therefore, He does not require us to negate this enjoyment, only to refine ourselves so that we can use the materiality of this world as means of enhancing our Divine consciousness, rather than allowing our enjoyment of materiality to impair our Divine consciousness.

In order to refine ourselves this way, it is imperative that we remain humble - considering ourselves mere "earthenware vessels," as unassuming as the dust from which we were formed. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 17, pp. 166-171) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

TOTAL IMMERSION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"A man from whom there is an emission of semen shall immerse his entire flesh in the water and remain impure until evening." (15:16)

The Torah prescribes immersion in water as a necessary stage in ridding ourselves of ritual defilement. This process requires us to renew our dedication to living life in the positive and wholesome way prescribed by the Torah.

Indeed, the imagery that the prophet Yeshayahu uses to describe how, in the Messianic future, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d" is "as water covers the seabed" (Yeshayahu 11:9).

The reason that water plays a crucial role in the process of purification is due to its ability to bind particles that would otherwise remain separate (for example, of earth or flour) into a cohesive mass.

Allegorically, this alludes to our Divine mission as human beings: to take all the facets of our lives, which appear to be unrelated and even in some cases at odds with each other, and unite them into a unified fabric of Divine living.

We do this by realizing the Divine source of all creation, thereby revealing the Divine purpose in every element of creation. In this way, we become the "water" that saturates reality with Divine consciousness, giving it its desired form and purpose. (Hitva'aduyot 5720, vol. 1, pp. 477-481) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

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