

Metzarah - Rabbi Lerner - April 3, 2011

Perek 14

14:1 *The metzarah is brought to the kohain on the day he is becoming tahor.* But this is actually not accurate - he first has to follow a list of tasks before he can become tahor - he has to be inspected by the kohain, he has to go to the mikvah, he has to bring korbanos - it takes at least a week. So how can the Torah say he will be brought to the kohain on the day he will become tahor? Some meforshim say it means the beginning of the cleansing process. **Kli Yakar**: when it says the day of his becoming tahor, it means the turnaround in terms of his heart - it doesn't refer to the external actions - it means the spiritual renewal, his getting away from the lashan harah that put him into this situation in the first place. If he responds correctly internally, then Hashem will clear away the external signs of his disease; but Hashem will not let this process proceed until he has purified his thoughts, and purified his eyes that used to look at people to criticize them. Hashem will then accept his teshuvah.

It says *Vehuvah El Hakohein*, he will be brought to the kohain. Earlier in 13:2 it used the same language when the Torah introduced the topic of tzara'as, and there it meant that he was brought to the kohain against his will - he didn't want to be declared tamei and a pariah who will be exiled. But why would it use that same word now - one would think he would go willingly and enthusiastically to the kohain; and certainly if he had a change of heart, then he certainly would be eager to go? **Ramban**: he is brought to the kohain - he cannot delay to see if he truly is cured spiritually; we want to expedite the process of taharah. What Hashem is signaling to us is that sometimes people want the quiet, they enjoy being a hermit, being away from people and responsibilities; no need to earn a living and support a family. The Torah does not allow this - as soon as he is ready to become tahor, it is necessary for him to be brought back into society.

After discussing the process of becoming tahor, the Torah then begins to discuss another type of tzara'as - that type appearing on the walls of one's house. Why not present this together with the other forms of tzara'as instead of after describing the cleansing process? **Rabbeinu Bachya**: if you look at both parshios, it adds up to 10 different types of tzara'as - six deal with the person himself, and four that are external to the body - three different garments (linen, wool, leather) and then one on the house. These 10 are parallel to the ten commandments, the fundamental mitzvos of the Torah. These 10 types of tzara'as match the number of commandments - if you observe the commandments, then you will be spared these 10 punishments. These sins destroy the fabric of Jewish unity and Hashem is very vigilant about these sins.

Rabbeinu Bachya: the sequence of these plagues seems to be contrary to what we would expect and what Chazal say. Initially Hashem would afflict one's house, which is the most external to us. If that doesn't serve as a wake-up call from one's sins, then Hashem afflicts the garments which are much closer to the person. If that doesn't work, then He strikes the body. But this is the opposite order from the way the Torah presents these conditions - first the Torah talks about tzara'as that affects the body, then garments, and then the house. Shouldn't the Torah have reversed the order if the order of affliction is actually the reverse? Chazal were not wrong - we don't want the order of punishment in the Torah to get progressively worse. A person perceives that the Torah places them in order of increasing severity because he only considers things from a financial standpoint; in this sense the house is the greatest loss to the person, with the next in order being one's garments, and then finally the person who is afflicted on the skin

goes into seclusion and gets better with no monetary loss. But in reality, the worse punishment is to the body when one considers the spiritual affect. Hashem puts forth His good face - He reverses the order so that the punishments do not escalate spiritually. Hashem places the financial order in escalation rather than the real way punishment is given.

If tzara'as affects his head, he is called a *tzaruah* - it reflects the source of the sin, the brain. The first time the word metzora is used in Vayikrah is in this parsha, instead of Tazriah where all of the body plagues are discussed - why? **Oznavim LaTorah**: quotes the **Marshah** who says the gemorrah in Eruchin lists the seven different sins that make someone into a metzora. But there is a difference between Negah Hatzara'as and a Metzora. The metzora is one who is defined as a full-fledged leper. The kohain initially places someone in temporary seclusion because of doubt before declaring him a metzora - he is locked up in his house - this is not a definite tzara'as. The other form is when it is a definite tzara'as, and he is declared a metzora muchlat - he is expelled from the camp. Six type of sins cause the lower form of metzora. Our parsha only discusses the muchlat - he is called the metzora because he is motzi rah - he disseminates evil; this is the one who sins with lashan harah. The other six sins do not cause one to be labeled a metzora - they are not forced into total isolation. That is why Toras metzora is reserved until this final one, the person who is completely ejected from society. Why is lashan harah so dangerous? It is the most difficult for one to recognize how wrong you are - you are telling the truth after all. Some people are involved with sexual sinning; more people with some type of theft; but all of us are guilty of lashan harah. We can so easily rationalize it, and that's what makes it so difficult to do teshuvah from this sin. Murder, theft and adultery are more obvious sins; lashan harah is not obvious, and Hashem has to prove it to us, to make us feel the guilt.

Rav Nissan Alpert: arrogance is one of the causes of tzara'as, where we feel superior to others, making it easy for us to criticize others. Arrogance is therefore one of the chief causes of lashan harah. When it says he is brought to the kohain, it is outside of the camp - the kohain does not go to him, but he cannot come into the camp to see the kohain. There is a place built outside the camp where the kohain would go to examine the metzorahs. If the kohain is already outside the camp, why does the metzora have to be brought to the kohain? Because the problem is Gayvah, arrogance - the kohain cannot go all the way to him. To break him of his Gayvah, he is brought against his will to the examination room. We also see this idea in the end of shemona esrei, where in Elokai Leshoni we say that Hashem should guard our tongues from evil, and our soul should be like dust to those who curse us - we have to become a person who will speak no evil, we must not get involved even with difficult people, people who are attacking us; we should just ignore them and not get into a back and forth argument where we will say evil things. We do this by thinking that we are very lowly and should not answer the evil person who curses us.

14:4: *He takes two birds, cedar wood, a crimson thread, and hyssop.* **Rashi**: each item represents another problem; the cedar tree represents arrogance, and he takes the other items which are the lowliest items to balance that out. He takes the two extremes to represent going from arrogance to the most humble of people - that is the correction for the plague. **Chidushei Harim**: If his problem is arrogance, why should he take the cedar wood at all - we want him to get away from that symbol - he should just take the lowly items? The reason he brings the cedar wood is because there are different types of humility - one true and one deficient. Anavah Pesulah is when you knock yourself down so much that you feel you can no longer be a force for good, you are no longer worth anything. That is not the humility we desire. Moshe was the most humble of people, yet he accomplished the most. Humility is not self-deprecation - you are not

supposed to make yourself feel that you are worthless. Therefore, he takes some of the cedar wood - you have to have the right balance - you need something to represent your value, but always in perspective. Just as Hashem is described as one who is the highest of the high; but He also watches out for the poor and the infirm and the ger. We should do the same - that is the concept of anavah.

Oznayim LaTorah: the purification process is quite involved. The metzorah brings the two birds; he washes his garments; he shaves all of the hair of his body. Then he returns to the camp even though he is not yet tahor, but he does not enter his house - he remains outside of his house and family. Why this interim status? It is a testing period. When in isolation, he could not commit sins - there was no one to talk to. This is a trial period is to see if he is a changed person now that he is back with people again. It is a step by step approach.

Ramban: he brings several different korbanos - three different types. Why? There are three different types of sins requiring forgiveness, and three different korbanos. The asham is for the guilt of the original sin he perpetrated. The chatos is for the sin that he is committing being in isolation outside of the camp - he may be cursing God while in exile; he is cynical and thinking bad thoughts or saying bad things against God. The olah and minchah are to bring him back to society because he created a sin against God by making Hashem punish him; it is not what God wants to do. Hashem wants to be nice and sweet to people, always rewarding people; now Hashem has to be tough with him - that is a terrible sin. We owe it to Hashem to beg Him for forgiveness for turning Him into a harsh parent.