

## Spotlight on... Ears, Fingers, Blood and Toes

### Background:

This week we read a double parsha, Tazria-Metzora. Most of this parsha is devoted to the laws of tzara'at, a mysterious physical/spiritual condition that causes discoloration of the skin. Tzara'at is mysterious because we don't know what it was or what caused people to get it. We don't know what it was because the symptoms do not definitely correlate with any known medical conditions. We don't know what caused it because the Torah doesn't tell us!

There was an elaborate process for someone to be both diagnosed with tzara'at and later purified from it. If someone was found to have tzara'at, they had to leave the camp until their condition had healed. It seems like it would have been really difficult emotionally to have tzara'at. For that reason, a lot of the rabbis believe that tzara'at was a punishment a person would receive for speaking lashon hara, or saying something bad about someone else.

Chapter 14 describes the purification process. As verses 14 and 17 explain, part of this process involved the kohen taking blood from the korbanot the metzora had to bring, and putting that blood on the metzora's right ear, right thumb, and right big toe. The kohen then did the same thing with some oil. This seems like a pretty strange thing to do!

Because this seems odd, some of the rabbis read it symbolically. The Alshich explains that these three body parts correspond to the actions that result from speaking lashon hara. When someone (let's call him Reuven) speaks lashon hara to another person (let's call her Rivkah) Reuven's words enter Rivkah's ear. Then, Rivkah will be so upset to hear about the person Reuven is discussing that she will use her hands to kill that person. Finally, the dead person's family will seek to avenge their blood, and run on their feet to kill Rivkah. And that is why the kohen puts the blood on the metzora's ear, thumb, and toe - because when you speak lashon hara, it involves all 3 of those body parts.

### Questions:

1. What is your reaction to the Alshich's explanation? Why?
2. Not everyone agrees that tzara'at is caused by speaking lashon hara. A few rabbis think it was just something that happened, without a particular reason. How do you think they might explain why the blood and oil go on the ear, thumb, and big toe?