

Tazriah - Rabbi Lerner - March 27, 2011

Tzara'as

Is this disease contagious or not? **Abarbanel**: The reason the Torah gives potent warning against this more than other illness is because it is different in its contagious capability; it is a spiritual defilement, not physical; those who come in contact with this illness can contaminate their neshamos. It is because of this great Tumah that they are expelled from all of the camps, because they can contaminate others, even the air around them. Other diseases do not affect the soul or the atmosphere. It can defile the holy bais hamikdash and the camp; that is why we are so strict about it.

There are other Rishonim who disagree with the Abarbanel: the **Rambam** and **Ralbag** say it *is* a contagious disease. The **Meshech Chachmah** says that Tzara'as can spread, and is contagious; as the **Medrish Rabah** says, if a metzora is in an alley, one should not enter into it; after a person is declared to be a metzora by a kohen, the pasuk says in 13:45 *Tamei Tamei Yikrah* - this means he warns people to stay away from him so they do not contract the illness. Then, why is it that the kohein is the one who is involved in the diagnosis, rather than a doctor? It is very dangerous to be involved with this illness - even doctors would be at risk; one needs special divine protection when dealing with people with Tzara'as - the person involved should be someone with special protection; therefore, it was given over to the kohanim who are in a different league; they are more involved with the service of God and are protected more than regular Jews; therefore, Hashem entrusts it into their care because they have spiritual immunity.

13:2-3: *He is brought to Aharon the kohain or one of his children.* Why mention the kohain gadol? *He sees the plague on the skin of the flesh; that area the hair has turned white, and there is a deep white appearance to the flesh; it is Tzara'as and the kohain will examine him and declare him contaminated.* Why use this name Negah Tzara'as in this pasuk? **Abarbanel**: it is called a negah because the skin is naguah, it is smitten, and he is afflicted with physical pain. When the Mitzrim are to get the final plague, God refers to it as a negah - it is painful. Why is it called Tzara'as? Because it is a contraction of two words: Tzarah - agony and Ra'aso - it is his pain coming from his evil; he is doing bad things and it is causing him physical pain in addition to being excommunicated from family, friends, and livelihood. **Oznayim LaTorah**: quotes the Toras Kohanim: it is a negah Tzara'as, not just Tzara'as, because it is very painful; how do we know that others feel the pain? That is why it says negah Tzara'as - it means that others feel the pain. The Torah says Vehuvah - he is brought to the kohain, even against his will - he doesn't want to go because being declared a metzora is not a good thing; but how do others know that he has this affliction? It could be hidden. They know he has this because he is in severe pain and he cannot mask it; they will then bring him against his will. The proof is with Miriam who is stricken with Tzara'as in parshas Beha'alosechah, where it says in 12:10 that she is afflicted with Tzara'as that is white as snow; it then says Aharon turns to her and sees she is afflicted. If it was not visible, why was Aharon turning to her? Because she was in severe pain; he wasn't looking at her and suddenly hears her crying out in pain and he realizes she has Tzara'as; it wasn't visible, but the pain forces it to be revealed to others.

Why bring the metzora to Aharon or his children? **Rav Nissan Alpert**: it is not a physical disease, since it afflicts garments and houses; they are not contagious diseases. They only afflict Jews and not goyim; the pasukim say that it afflicts an adam; this word adam refers only to a Jew; Tzara'as does not relate to them; this proves that this is a special spiritual disease.

Then why is it that Hashem is being so strong about revealing people with this disease instead of being discrete with it? This is so different from the Torah's normal sensitivity, as with people who are afraid to go out to battle, afraid because they are sinners and they will die on the battlefield, they are excused amongst the others who are deferred because of a new wife, vineyard or home - God created these other categories of exemptions to cover up the sinners and preserve their dignity. It is just the opposite with Tzara'as, where the person is afflicted with pain to expose him - why so different? It is a midah kaneged midah - the metzora whose sin is Lashan Harah, has told a truthful but hurtful item about someone; this person was highlighting and revealing the bad things of others, so Hashem exposed his sins. In addition, when people spread lashan harah, they do it in a hidden way; to one's face they are nice and behave like a friend, but they say gossip and slander behind his back, they stab him in the back in such a false manner; so God exposes him for what he is. Finally, the **Dugna Magid** said he goes to the kohain, who is the only one who can make this determination. Even if the kohain knows he is a metzora, until he declares him verbally that he is a metzora, it doesn't happen. This shows the power of words. This person thinks he is doing no harm with just his words of lashan harah; we see the power of words because he is not a metzora until he is verbally declared to be one with just the one word.

Meshech Chachmah: why does it say in one pasuk that the kohain sees and examines him twice? Before the kohain declares him a metzora, he should examine the whole condition of the person, not just the skin; he has to see if this person should be declared a metzora. He has to see whether the person is a chassan or has some other major event, and whether this declaration will ruin his life. He has to examine the totality of his life. If it will cause problems, the kohain defers the declaration and should not declare him. Similarly, if it will prevent him from going up before Pesach on Aliyah Regel, he is not declared one yet - but then, he can contaminate everyone there if it is contagious. But doesn't this goes against the idea that it is contagious? He is only contagious after being declared a metzora - it is not contagious until that point. It is not a simple contagious issue. Since it is spiritual, the best person to be involved here with the sinner is Aharon, the high priest. You want to go to the person who can teach the most about kedusha and living the proper life with proper midos. If he is not available, then they go to one of his sons.

Rav Baruch Simon: Quotes the **Or Hachayim**: Tzara'as has a lot to do with ahavas yisrael; that is why lashan harah is the main target. When one knocks down a fellow Jew, one is lacking understanding of love for a Jew. Even if a Jew sins, he can be salvaged; there is a part of every Jew that is still pure and untainted. One of the cases of Tzara'as in 13:40 appears on his head; the kohain locks him up, and calls him in 13:45 a tzaru'ah, a person with Tzara'as.

Meshech Chachmah - a Tzara'as that strikes the head, Hashem is targeting the part of the body from where the sin arises - from the brain - he is a tzaru'ah. Why is one whose whole body is not a metzora? The **Or Hachayim** says it is because a Jew is called adam, a mensch. Every Jew has redeeming qualities to him. We all have faults and are diseased in some way, but the inner core is pure. If the whole body is white, it cannot be Tzara'as because he cannot be all bad; this must be a physical condition, not Tzara'as. No Jew can be totally contaminated and defiled and can't be rehabilitated. That is why it says the Tzara'as is in the skin of the flesh - it is only external, not the real flesh, the real being of the person. Shmutz clings to us and takes us astray, but it is not the real person who is still holy. Tzara'as testifies that we should love every Jew and never give up hope; that is why the task falls on Aharon who was the Oheiv Shalom, who would never give up on any Jew.