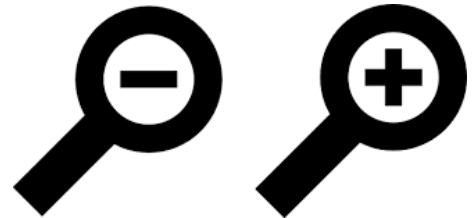




## The Parsha in Practice

### Take a Second Look

One of the most notable features of the quasi-physical malady of Tzaraat is the fact the responsibility for its diagnosis is given not to a medical professional, but to the Kohen. Of course, seeing how the conditions of Tzaraat is spiritual in origin, it would follow that that the person tasked to identify it and assist the convalescent “patient” would be - specifically - a spiritual leader.



Because of the educational nature of Tzaraat as a punishment, there are also many lessons that we learn from the various interactions that the Kohen has with the one who is infected. Here is one:

The pasuk states:

וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַנִּגְעַת בְּעוֹר־הַבָּשָׂר וְשַׁעַר בְּנִגְעַת הַפֶּה | לָבֵן וּמְרָאָה הַנִּגְעַל עֲמֻק מֵעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ נִגַע צִרְעָת הוּא וְרָאָה הוּא הַכֹּהֵן וְטָמֵא אֹתוֹ:

*The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of his body: if hair in the affected patch has turned white and the affection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous affection; when the priest sees it, he shall pronounce him unclean.*

Notice the repeated word. Two times in one verse we find that the Kohen must “see” the affliction. The redundancy is obvious. Clearly, he has seen it already, so why then does it need to be said again?

The Sifri explains that the emphasis on seeing the blemish teaches that the affliction needs to be entirely visible for the Kohen to be able to make an “impure” declaration. The Kohen must view it from all angles.

R’ Meir Simcha of Dvinsk explains that the double “vision” expected doesn’t relate to how much of the affliction is visible, but how much of the “patient” the Kohen can see. In order to pass judgement on the Metzorah, the Kohen needs to not only review his symptoms, but to analyze his complete situation.

As an example, the Gemara in Moed Katan (7b) says that if a groom develops a blemish, the Kohen should wait until the seven days of Sheva Berachot are concluded before viewing it. So too if a

person develops a blemish before a Chag, the Kohen should wait until the end of that Chag to schedule his appointment. The Kohen doesn't only require the ability to diagnose the spot on the skin but requires the situational awareness of what his decision will mean for the afflicted and must be ready to delay that decision until the time is right.

While these two examples - weddings and holidays - are mitzvot, R' Yehuda HaNasi also extends this to scenarios of "reshut," where the need for delay is more mundane. There too, the Kohen needs to see what is happening in the person's life and must postpone their encounter until it will work for everyone involved.

R' Meir Simcha refers us to the Pasuk of דְּרַכָּיָהּ דְּרַכֵּי נְעָם which he believes is the source of this concept. The Torah's ways are meant to be ways of pleasantness and if he can be helped through delay, the person in question should be able to finish whatever it is that was important to them before having their lives upended by a Tzaraat declaration.

There is a lesson here for those rendering halachic decisions to account - to the extent possible - for the meta-issues that are involved in a given question, but also for those who are involved in any type of judgement forming. We must look twice before we measure a particular action of a person. As the very first teaching of Pirkei Avot instructs: הָיוּ מְתוּנִים בְּדִין, we need to be patient in judgement. This patience is not only required so that you can assemble all the facts of the case, but to be able to ensure that your judgement sees not only the data, but its context as well.

I recall training for a marathon and having difficulty on a particularly long training run. I was over 15 miles into the run and running far below my usual pace, and suddenly I hear "On your right!" and quickly saw the blur of another runner pass me by. It was so frustrating to feel so slow, but I also could not help but wonder what that other runner must have felt when passing me. He knew that he passed a slow runner, that was obvious to see. But had he also recognized that my slooow speed may have been only due to where I had been already? Unlikely. (More likely he hadn't even noticed me at all!)

Do we pass judgment on others with only one eye and without the depth of perception to see where they have been or what challenges may have led them to this point?

The Torah wishes for the Kohen to do more than closely examine the case before him and to instead attempt to understand the larger context of the person he is judging. Not only to look directly ahead, but to scan the periphery of their experience before judging them.

We too are obligated to look twice and delay our judgements. We might zoom in on a particular moment or act, but without the wisdom to zoom out to see more, we are certainly missing the full picture.

Shabbat Shalom,

Shmuel Ismach