



TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Tazriah-Metzorah

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A Taste of Torah Getting Under Your Skin

by Rabbi Shmuel Halpern

One of the unique aspects of the affliction of *tzara'as* (a spiritual skin malady often incorrectly associated with leprosy) is the involvement of the *kohen*. Only a *kohen* may render the decision regarding the status of a suspected affliction of *tzara'as*. A Torah scholar well-versed in the laws of *tzara'as* may advise the *kohen*, but only the *kohen* may actually render the decision. Why the *kohen* specifically? In addressing this question, we would do well to understand the two parts of the *kohen's* role.

Initially, the *kohen* must determine whether a particular skin affliction is *tzara'as* and, if it is, he must declare the *metzorah* (individual afflicted with *tzara'as*) impure. Subsequently, when the *tzara'as* appears to have healed, the *kohen* has a second job, as he is the one who declares the *metzorah* cured and pure. Regarding the purification process, the *kohen's* role is more understandable. A *metzorah* is punished by being distanced from others, as he must dwell outside the camp. Our Sages teach that this is a punishment for creating distance between people through the speaking of *lashon hara* (negative talk about other people). Aharon, the first *kohen*, is regarded by the Torah as one who epitomized seeking peace between people. It is therefore appropriate that the *kohen* is the one who declares the *metzorah* pure and thus confirms the *metzorah's* repentance from causing strife. Regarding declaring the *metzorah* impure, however, it is difficult to understand why the *kohen*, who creates peace, ought to be the one to declare a person as a *metzorah* and thus find him guilty of disturbing that peace.

The Sfas Emes (Rabbi Aryeh Yehuda Leib Alter; 1847-1905) explains that the answer to this question is hinted to in the word *metzorah*, which can be divided into two words, *motzi* (drawing forth) and *ra* (evil). This gives us a new perspective on the purpose of *tzara'as*. It isn't merely a punishment, but, rather, a purification process. *Tzara'as* draws the evil away from the inner recesses of the *metzorah's* inner self and expresses it externally upon the skin.

A person who refuses to recognize his weaknesses and instead tries to paper them over will continue to remain deeply connected to them. However, by recognizing one's imperfections and devising a plan to deal with them, one can tap into the purity that's been covered by layers of sin.

The Sfas Emes continues that a *metzorah* should accept his *tzara'as* with love. This seems counterintuitive; shouldn't the *metzorah* be distraught over his lowly state? Wouldn't an acceptance of the sins lead to complacency? The aforementioned concept explains the importance of recognizing one's faults. However, it doesn't at all explain the need to **embrace** those weaknesses.

Perhaps the answer to this question lies in the concept of humility. Humility is a central part of the *metzorah's* *teshuvah* (repentance). This is evidenced by the hyssop grass used as part of the purification process. Our Sages teach that there is a message contained in the grass, that one must act humbly, like the humble and lowly grass. It is only by experiencing *tzara'as*, which separates the evil from the person's essence, that the *metzorah* can attain humility. Only a person who has

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Stories for the Soul Language Barrier

The Vilna Gaon (Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer of Vilna; 1720-1797) spent a number of years travelling in self-imposed exile. At one point, as he sat as a passenger in a wagon, the wagon driver brought the horse and wagon into a field so that the horse could graze.

The wagon driver left for a short while, and the Vilna Gaon was alone on the wagon. Unfortunately, the field was privately owned, and the wagon driver had not obtained permission to graze his horses there. Sure enough, the owner of the field approached, saw animals grazing in his field, and became angry. He found only the Vilna Gaon on the wagon, and, assuming that he was the driver, began to hit him for bringing his animals into his field. The Vilna Gaon did not defend himself, and allowed himself to be beaten.

Years later, the Vilna Gaon related the incident to his student, Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner, and added that he could have saved himself from the beatings by telling the man that he was just a passenger and wasn't guilty for what happened. However, said the Vilna Gaon, that would be *lashon hara* (slander) regarding the real driver (as the owner would have waited for him to return and berated him). It was preferable, said the Vilna Gaon, to endure the verbal and physical abuse rather than be guilty of a trace of *lashon hara*.

Our Sages teach us that primary cause of *tzara'as* is speaking *lashon hara*, slander. It is clear from many sources throughout the ages that *lashon hara* must be avoided, even if one will suffer abuse or loss of livelihood because of it.

Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Parsha Quizzers

The six items below can be found in Rashi's commentary to this week's parsha. Can you figure out where they are? (Answers on bottom)

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|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) A very long day | 4) High to low |
| 2) Separate but equal | 5) Long enough to eat |
| 3) One word, two meanings | 6) 7-11 |

Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Menashe ben Yisrael - Part I

One of the more fascinating biographies of the past 500 years is that of Rabbi Menashe ben Yisrael, better known as Menashe ben Israel or Manasseh ben Israel. His life is a reflection of the unpredictable and unexpected events that have shaped the course of Jewish history since the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash nearly two millennia ago. In particular, his life is a microcosm of the struggles faced by many Sephardim (Spanish Jews) more than a century after the Spanish Expulsion in 1492.

Menashe ben Israel was born in 1604. Menashe's parents had lived in Lisbon,

Portugal until 1603. Many Spanish Jews emigrated to Portugal following the Spanish Expulsion of 1492. The Portuguese government forced the Jews to convert in 1497; those who were not interested in living externally as Christians left Portugal, while those who remained were forced to hide their Judaism. Thus, Menashe's parents were conversos, secret Jews (popularly known as marranos, a pejorative term whose meaning is the subject of some debate). Menashe was given the Christian name Manoel Dias Soeiro.

A Taste of Torah

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worked to purify his personality from negative traits can attain true humility. The arrogant person will inevitably get caught in a cycle of self-justification.

It has been said that humility is synonymous with brutally honest self-awareness. The truly humble have a strong awareness of both their strengths and their weaknesses. It is this self-knowledge that propels the humble person to ever-increasing greatness. Cognizant of their weaknesses, they strive to make their good qualities the defining aspect of their personalities. The humble person is excited to learn about his shortcomings, for it marks the next great frontier!

Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld (1925-1990) said that the most exciting moments of his life were those following a serious reckoning of his life. At that time, he had an awareness of where he needed to be, and what he needed to do to get there. He had never felt more alive.

We now have an idea of the great value of *tzara'as* in restoring the true potential of the *metzora*. The *kohen*, who is the man of peace, is truly the one who can see the *metzora* for the pure person he is, and the *tzara'as* as an external blemish. It is thus appropriate that the *kohen* declare the *metzora* impure, thereby allowing the *metzora* to see his own innate purity.

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| 1) A very long day 12:4 s.v. bicho | 4) High to low 14:4 s.v. v'etiz and ushm |
| 2) Separate but equal 13:24 s.v. hamichva | 5) Long enough to eat 14:46 s.v. yitma |
| 3) One word, two meanings 13:58 s.v. vichibes | 6) 7-11 15:25 s.v. bilo and al |

Parsha Quizzers - Answers