

INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.

וראה הכהן...והנה לא הפך הנגע את עינו...טמא הוא

"If the kohen shall see...the plague has not reversed its color...it is impure..." (13:55)

Chazal noted, and several *seforim* discuss in various ways, the fact that the term נגע – plague has the same letters as ענג – pleasure, the difference being only in the placement of the letter “*ayin*” at the beginning or end of the word. The great *halachic* authority, *Rav Ephraim Zalman Margolios*, notes in his volume *Yad Ephraim*, that this is hinted at in this verse. Had the plague reversed its “*ayin*” – which usually translates as “eye”, it would have been at the beginning of the word instead of at the end, and the result would have been pleasure! Since the *kohen* saw no change, the item remains impure. (Yad Ephraim)

זאת תהיה תורת המצורע

"This shall be the law of the leper..." (14:2)

The word for leper is *metzora*, which can be seen as an abbreviation for the words מוציא רע (שם), depicting slander. As discussed in *Parshat Tazria*, leprosy is not a natural disease. It is the result of seven sins, generally, *lashon hara*. *Lashon hara* is worse than bloodshed. One who murders, murders but one person. However, one who speaks *lashon hara* harms three: the one who speaks it, the one who hears it and the one who is spoken of.

When a person speaks ill of his fellow man, he is considered to have violated the entire Torah. The word “Torah” (law) is written here five times, once in *Parshat Tazria* and four times in *Parshat Metzora*: *This is the law of the leprous mark (13:59); This is the law of the metzora (14:2); This is the law of one who has the mark of leprosy (14:33); This is the law for every leprous mark (14:54); This is the law of leprosy (14:57)*. The study of the Five Books of the Torah and the practice of the *mitzvot* of the Torah are the best remedy against the flaws that bring about such afflictions. (Torah Gems)

The *Midrash Tanchuma* comments that the plague of *tzara'as*, leprosy, is in retribution for tale-bearing and slander. The prohibition against tale-bearing is stated in *Parshat Kedoshim*, לא תלך רכיל בעמך, “Do not go around as a gossip among your people.” (*Vayikra* 19:16) The numerical value of this clause adds up to 883. Its punishment, נגע צרעת, also amount to 883. Thus, the sin and its penalty are equivalent – the punishment fits the crime. (Otzar Chaim)

וצוה הכהן ולקח למטהר שתי צפרים חיות טהרות

“The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, clean birds.” (14:4)

It is noteworthy that in the purification process of the *metzora*, the Kohen must witness the ceremony and instruct the participants. This is unlike any other *mitzvah*, for in all other *mitzvot*, those commanded to fulfill the *mitzvah* naturally comply, and no supervision is required. In this case, however, the Torah requires supervision, to teach us that when we instruct our pupils in the way of Hashem, it does not suffice merely to teach them what to do, but we must stand over them and watch how they do it. Particularly, if a pupil errs, as the *metzora* did, he definitely requires individual attention. Only in this manner can we hope that one’s disciples will be G-d fearing people and *Bnei Torah*.
(*Drash Moshe*)

ולקח למטהר שתי צפרים חיות טהרות

“And for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, clean birds.” (14:4)

As part of this purification process, a *metzora* is required to bring a sacrifice of two birds. The *Zohar* explains that one bird was to atone for his evil speech and the other was to atone for the fact that he did not use his speech positively.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand explains that *lashon hara* is a grave sin, but the lost opportunity for *lashon tov*, positive speech, is a sin unto itself.
(*Torah Tavlin*)

יגלח את כל שערו את ראשו ואת זקנו ואת גבת עיניו

“...He shall shave off all his hair, from his head, beard and eyebrows...” (14:9)

The three principal transgressions punished with *tzara’at* are haughtiness, evil gossip and an envious eye. Hence, in order to become clean again, the leper must symbolically cleanse himself of these three sins. He must shave all the hair off his head because he was haughty and wanted to be “at the head” of everything. Next, he must shave off his beard because it failed to guard the mouth, which it surrounds, from uttering evil gossip. Finally, he must shave his eyebrows which failed to keep his eyes from envy.
(*Kli Yakar*)

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