

מצורע

LASHON HARA

The *metzora* is required to undergo a unique and unusual purification ritual.

וצוה הכהן ולקח למטהר שתי צפרים חיות טהרות ועץ ארז ושני תולעת ואזב

Then the *Kohein* shall command to take for him that is to be purified two birds alive and clean, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop (*Vayikra* 14:4).

The Ibn Ezra (*ibid.*) notes that the cedar wood and the hyssop represent the tallest and the smallest in the species of vegetation. Thus the law of the leper, and the laws of the house stricken with leprosy (*Vayikra* 14:52), and the law of impurity conveyed by a corpse (*Bamidbar* 19:6,18) are all closely related in that in each of these cases the cedar wood and the hyssop are required ingredients in the process of purification. All the aforementioned resemble the *Pesach* of Mitzraim where the hyssop was used to sprinkle the blood of the *karban Pesach* upon the lentil and the two sideposts (as an indication to the Destroyer that he should not enter that Jewish home). The Ibn Ezra is suggesting a parallel between the two purification procedures. In Mitzraim, the hyssop was used to keep the Destroyer from the door, and it would serve the same purpose upon an affected person or house which was undergoing purification. The relationship between the state of leprosy, the state of impurity (or similarly *aveilus*—mourning) and the state of *Klal Yisrael* at the time of the first *karban Pesach* must be understood.

The *Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah* 17:3) itemizes ten sins which are punished by *nega'im*, but the substantive sin which the Torah highlights as the cause of this affliction is *lashon hara (Arachin* 15•). The term “*metzora*” (מצורע) is actually a composite of the words “*motzi ra*” (מוציא רע) — “issuing evil.” For committing this anti-social act, the *metzora* is banished from society. In fact, he is removed from all three *machanos* —camps— as opposed to the *tamei meis* —one made ritually impure by contact with the dead—who is only removed from two *machanos*. The *metzora* must announce his condition when approached by others so that all will avoid him. During this period of isolation, the *metzora* is expected to regain his physical and spiritual equilibrium. (Similarly, the *aveil* — mourner — is expected to perform *teshuvah* during his seven days of isolation.) As long as the *metzora* is in this state, he is considered as if he were dead (*Nedarim* 64:). The reason for this is that by “issuing evil” he demonstrated animalistic use of his power of speech and thereby removed himself from the ranks of the “speaking creatures.”

There is a statement in *Sefer Yetzirah*:

אין ברע למטה מנגע

In the state of evil there is nothing lower than *tzara'as*.

The nadir of evil is a *metzora*, and his becoming a *metzora* is due to his speaking *lashon hara*. The Maharal (*Gur Aryeh, Vayikra* 14:2) explains that *tzara'as* is a living expression of death; it is

the manifestation of death in a breathing creature, making the *metzora* the lowest form of human existence (see *Kuzari* III:60).

The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 42•) lists four groups of people who will not be privileged to encounter the *Shechinah*: the scoffers, the liars, the flatterers, and the purveyors of evil talk. He who speaks evil is as one who denies the existence of the Almighty (*Arachin* 15:). The sin is tantamount to the three cardinal sins: idolatry, incest and murder (ibid.) for which one is responsible to offer his life in an attempt to avoid trespass. Interestingly, *Rabbeinu Yonah* (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 3:231) even includes in the category of *lashon hara* the trait of complaining or whining about life, and he explains that this group will not be included among those who will be worthy to greet the *Shechinah*.

Our sages consider which is the more serious sin: *ona'as mamon* — vexing one's fellow man with money — or *ona'as devarim* — vexing one's fellow man with words (*Bava Metzia* 58:). They conclude that the sin of vexing with words is associated with the *pasuk*, “You shall fear Hashem” (*Vayikra* 25:17) while monetary vexation is not associated with this *pasuk*. Also, a financial crime can always be reversed with compensation, while a verbal crime can never be completely restituted. Of course, one may apologize for an insult, but complete *teshuvah* is impossible. How can one remove the hurt suffered by an insulted fellow man?

The *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 9:) states that there are six blessings rewarded to the giver of charity, while there are eleven blessings associated with being cordial to a fellow human being. Hence, greater emphasis is placed on displaying civility to a fellow human being than in even financially supporting him.

טוב המלבין שינים לחבירו יותר ממשקהו חלב

A sincere smile to a fellow man is more praiseworthy than even feeding him
(*Kesubos* 111:).

The importance of courteous, civil conduct cannot be overstated, and it is a cornerstone of Torah existence. The *metzora* who violates this code of social behavior removes himself from the living community, and therefore his sin is considered among the vilest and most contemptible. The contagious aspect of the state of the *metzora* is his bad behavior — hence, his forced isolation.

The other rite involving the hyssop, was the blood of the *karban Pesach* at *Yetzias Mitzraim*. From time immemorial mankind has sought to identify itself with Hashem via an animal sacrifice. Kayin and Hevel brought offerings to Hashem (*Bereishis* 4:3-4), Adam brought *karbanos* (*Avodah Zarah* 8•), Noach offered a sweet savor to Hashem (*Bereishis* 8:20), and this was the custom of all mankind through all the generations. All their offerings were burnt offerings — an offering that was completely consumed by fire. When *Klal Yisrael* came onto the scene with their *karban Pesach*, they were instructed by Hashem to “eat the flesh” of the *karban* (*Shemos* 12:8). This is the first time in human history that a human being had the audacity to share with Hashem in His *karban*. *Klal Yisrael* became, so to speak, partners with Hashem in the *karban*. What was up to now totally consumed by fire, could now also be consumed by the corporeal bodies of *Klal Yisrael*, and it would be considered as if it were offered up on an altar completely consumed by fire.

This gives new dimension to the exclamation of Shlomo *Hamelech*:

עורי צפון ובואי תימן

“Awake, O’ north, and come you of the south” (*Shir Hashirim* 4:16).

Traditionally, the nations of the world were referred to as the “north,” while *Klal Yisrael* was referred to as the “south.” Thus, the verse is actually saying, “Awake, you nations of the north, for *Klal Yisrael* of the south is now coming. Awake, you nations of the north — whose *karbanos* (the *karban olah*) were always restricted to the north side of the *mizbei’ach*. For now *Klal Yisrael* is emerging on the scene; they are not restricted to the north side of the *mizbei’ach* — they can also offer a *karban shelamim* (a *karban Pesach* is of the *shelamim* family) which is sacrificed on the south side of the *mizbei’ach*. *Klal Yisrael* will now partake of *karbanos* together with Hashem. *Klal Yisrael* is no longer just another nation like other nations of the world — *Klal Yisrael* is now elevated to the status of super-nation. There are the nations of the world, and then there is *Klal Yisrael*” (see *Midrash Rabbah, Bereishis* 34:9).

חביב אדם שנברא בצלם

Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of Hashem (*Pirkei Avos* 3:14).

Every human being is beloved by Hashem, whether Jew or non-Jew.

חביבים ישראל שנקראו בנים למקום

Most beloved is Yisrael, for they are called children of Hashem (*ibid.*).

It was an act of special favor that it was disclosed to *Klal Yisrael* that they are called the “children of Hashem.” No other nation can share with Hashem in His sacrificial offerings; but a son may eat of his Father’s table. The *karban Pesach* inaugurated a new era for mankind, an era in which *Klal Yisrael* were permitted to share with Hashem in eating certain *karbanos*.

In effect, the elevated status of *Klal Yisrael* was reflected in their superior *Tzelem Elokim* — Image of G-d. The *Tiferes Yisrael* (*ibid.*) discloses that certain individuals of the nations possess *Tzelem Elokim*, but on the whole, the other nations may have forfeited their *Tzelem* image due to their wickedness. *Klal Yisrael* will never entirely lose the *Tzelem* because of its special relationship with Hashem. This new status of *Tzelem Elokim* was expressed by the uniqueness of the *karban Pesach* offering.

On the other hand, the *Metzora* seeks to destroy and break down the inherent *Tzelem Elokim* of his fellow human being. By belittling and embarrassing his peer, the *metzora* ignores and even attempts to dismiss another human being’s *Tzelem*. Hence, as part of his purification rite, he must return to basics. The *metzora* is reintroduced to the hyssop which was used during *Pesach Mitzraim* to demonstrate the nobility and aristocracy of each individual member of *Klal Yisrael*. As part of his re-assimilation into civil society, he must relearn the lesson of *Pesach Mitzraim*.

The *Ch’sam Sofer* (*Derashos* 594) points out that the hyssop specifically was used on *Pesach* (in *Mitzraim*) because it is the smallest of bushes. Its purpose was to remind *Klal Yisrael*:

לא מרבכם מכל העמים חשק ה' בכם, ויבחר בכם כי אתם המעט מכל העמים

Not because you are a majority among the nations did Hashem love you. He choose you because you were the fewest of all people (*Devarim* 7:7).

מי יקום יעקב כי קטן הוא

... how shall Yaakov stand? for he is small (*Amos* 7:2).

Nevertheless, Hashem chose you. Not necessarily due to your own merit, but because:

רק באבתיך חשק ה' לאהבה אותם, ויבחר בזרעם אחריהם בכם מכל העמים

Only that Hashem had a delight in your fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all people (*Devarim* 10:15).

The bush, which is the smallest of vegetation, reminds the nation that is smallest in number to rejoice in their exalted status (See Shabbos 67a; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:3). Traditionally, *Klal Yisrael* is aware of its exalted status, nevertheless their personal behavior is one of self-imposed minimization (*Chulin* 89•).

This attitude of minimization is a tenet of Torah life. Reconciling avowed national elitism with exacting personal deprecation is the mark of the Torah individual. The common thread of the state of leprosy, the state of impurity, the state of *aveilus* and the *karban Pesach* is to teach this fundamental lesson.

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