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PARSHA OVERVIEW

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Tazria

The Torah commands a woman to bring a *korban* after the birth of a child. A son is to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life. The Torah introduces the phenomenon of *tzara'at* (often mistranslated as leprosy) — a miraculous affliction that attacks people, clothing and buildings to awaken a person to spiritual failures. A *kohen* must be consulted to determine whether or not a particular mark is *tzara'at*. The *kohen* isolates the sufferer for a week. If the malady remains unchanged, confinement continues for a second week, after which the *kohen* decides the person's status. The Torah describes the different forms of *tzara'at*. One whose *tzara'at* is confirmed wears torn clothing, does not cut his hair, and must alert others that he is ritually impure. He may not have normal contact with people. The phenomenon of *tzara'at* on clothing is described in detail.

Metzora

The Torah describes the procedure for a *metzora* (a person afflicted with *tzara'at*) upon the conclusion of his isolation period. This process extends for a week and involves *korbanot* and immersions in a *mikveh*. Then, a *kohen* must pronounce the *metzora* pure. A *metzora* of limited financial means may substitute lesser offerings for the more expensive animals. Before a *kohen* diagnoses that a house has *tzara'at*, household possessions are removed to prevent them from also being declared ritually impure. The *tzara'at* is removed by smashing and rebuilding that section of the house. If the *tzara'at* signs reappear, the entire building must be razed. The Torah details which bodily secretions render a person spiritually impure, and thereby prevent his contact with holy items. And the Torah defines how one regains a state of ritual purity.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

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An Eternal Covenant

“And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised...” (12:3)

Saturday morning, 8 o'clock. The rest of the world is making its way to work through a gray London morning, but at a synagogue in an up-market part of North-West London, men in suits and ladies in hats are turning up to Synagogue Shabbat services. The people range from the fully Shabbat observant, to those whose connection to Judaism is a distant childhood memory.

And without realizing it, they are attesting to the accuracy of our Sages' words, "Every mitzvah for which the Jewish People have sacrificed their lives during periods of state persecution - including circumcision - is still observed by them." Also, "Every mitzvah that the Jews accepted upon themselves with joy, such as circumcision, endures." Brit Milah endures when many other mitzvahs have fallen by the wayside.

After a boy has been brought into the covenant of Avraham Avinu, of Abraham, we bless him and say, "In the same way that he has entered into the brit, so should he enter into Torah, to chupa, to marriage and good deeds!" This blessing is unique: At no other beginning in the life of a Jew do we give such a blessing. We don't say when a boy puts on tefillin for the first time, "Just as you have put on tefillin, may you enter marriage and good deeds." Why?

Because Brit Milah is indelible; it cannot be removed. Thus we bless the child that his attachment to Torah, to his wife and to good deeds should be an inextricable part of him.

S P E C I A L S

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

Taamei Hamitzvos - Tzaraas

Mitzvos #169, #172, #173, and #177

Our *parashah* specifies the signs and discusses the laws of *tzaraas*, a supernatural affliction that resembles skin disease, but which can be told apart by signs described in the Torah. *Ramban* (v. 47) explains that when the Jewish people are righteous and the Divine presence rests amongst them, their bodies, clothes, and houses have a good appearance. If, however, the Jewish people are unworthy and the Divine presence leaves them, this absence is manifest in the form of ugly *tzaraas*. *Tzaraas* can only

come when the Jewish people dwell in Eretz Yisrael because then the Divine presence rests to a greater degree and the effects of sin are more evident. The Kabbalists explain that *tzaraas* comes about when Divine energies depart from a body that is no longer worthy to host them, leaving a void (*Shem MiShmuel, Tazria* 5671; see also *Rabbeinu Bachaye* to 13:2).

The Sages teach that Hashem finds it difficult, so to speak, to smite a person. He therefore first afflicts a person's house with *tzaraas*, and if that warning does not suffice, He proceeds to afflict garments, and only if that measure fails does He afflict the body (*Tanchuma* §10). For the same reason, an affliction usually requires weeks of quarantine before it can be identified, to give the afflicted person time to repent and avoid the *tzaraas*. And once a person has been stricken with *tzaraas*, it will immediately heal if he repents (*Tanna D'vei Eliyahu* §16). When Hashem told the Jewish people about the laws of *tzaraas*, He announced it as if He was sharing good news, since *tzaraas* is a means of helping the Jewish people to rectify their ways (*Midrash HaGadol* 14:34).

Ramban explains that Hashem specifically marks a sinner's white garment with *tzaraas* to make it clearly visible, rather than marking a colored garment where the mark could be mistaken for dye discoloration. Thus, a colored garment is not subject to the impurity of *tzaraas*.

Tzaraas has many varieties. There are numerous shades of paleness, which indicate the loss of spiritual life and the severity of the sin. Some varieties create restrictions that last for a week, some for two, and some for a lifetime. Some are revealed and some are hidden beneath clothing. Sometimes the afflicted person must leave the city and live in solitude. Hashem created different levels of stringency corresponding to different levels of sinfulness (*Hagahos Rabbi Elyashiv to Arachin* 16a).

Tzaraas may afflict a person due to a severe violation of any one of the following sins: *Lashon hara* (evil speech), bloodshed, false oaths, sexual immorality, arrogance, theft, and miserliness (*Arachin* 16a; see also *Tanchuma* 14:2). Hashem rebukes a person by afflicting him with a type of *tzaraas* that alludes to the fault that he needs to correct (*Maharsha to Arachin* 16a). It is therefore possible for a person to infer the cause of his *tzaraas* based on its characteristics, as follows:

1. Miserliness: *Tzaraas* on one's house corresponds to miserliness. As the Sages expound, when a person avoids lending items to others by claiming that he does not possess them, Hashem smites his house with *tzaraas* and compels him to remove all

his possessions out to the street so that they will not become contaminated along with the house. People then see the items that he claimed not to possess (*Tanna D'vei Eliyahu* §16; see also *Tanchuma* §10).

2. Theft: *Tzaraas* on one's clothing alludes to theft (*ibid.*; see also *Arachin* *ibid.*), for it suggests that he does not deserve to wear his own clothing as a punishment for taking away the property of others.
3. Lashon hara: *Metzora* is an acronym for *motzi shem ra*, a slanderer (*Vayikra* 16:1). This reflects the idea that the main cause of *tzaraas* is *lashon hara* (*Sefer HaChinuch*). Since a slanderer creates disunity and separation in society, he is afflicted with *tzaraas* on his body and becomes separated from society. The purification process involves chirping birds to remind the *metzora* to be careful even regarding chirp-like chatter since it often leads to harmful gossip.
4. False oaths: A person who cannot be trusted even when he takes an oath undermines the quality of society, which is built on trust, so he is stricken with bodily *tzaraas* as well (see *Tanna D'vei Eliyahu* *ibid.*). Geichazi's skin was smitten with snow-white *tzaraas* when he swore falsely to Naaman. Geichazi's *tzaraas* lasted permanently, possibly because the Torah states that Hashem will not cleanse someone who swears falsely in His name (*Shemos* 20:7).
5. Arrogance: One who acts arrogantly is stricken with bodily *tzaraas* (*Tanna D'vei Eliyahu*); he must live in solitude until he learns how to relate to others. *Maharsha* suggests that *Karachas v'Gabachas*, a type of *tzaraas* that appears on the scalp (the highest point of the body), corresponds to arrogance. King Uziah was smitten this way when he brazenly sought to take up the role of *Kehunah* (*priesthood*) and offer incense. The purification ritual for *tzaraas* involves wood from a cedar tree, which is tall, as well as hyssop and a thread, which are small, to indicate the penitent must henceforth humble his arrogant nature.
6. Bloodshed: When Yoav killed Avner, David cursed him that *tzaraas* should come upon "his head." *Maharsha* sees this as an allusion to the type of *tzaraas* called "*nesek*," which involves hair loss and skin discoloration that is not related to natural causes. We may note that one of the signs of a *nesek* is a pair of short reddish hairs (*Onkelos*), which may symbolize the redness of blood and a life cut short.
7. Sexual immorality: There is a type of *tzaraas* that appears on a burn or a boil. *Alshich* sees burn-related *tzaraas* as an allusion to sexual immorality because a verse states that anyone who sins in this matter will invariably suffer burning (

Mishlei 6:28), presumably because this sin results from unbridled burning passion. We may suggest that boil-related *tzaraas* alludes to the same sin, for we find that Pharaoh was stricken with *tzaraas* of boils when he abducted Sarah, which served both as a punishment and as a means to prevent him from sinning (*Bereishis Rabbah* 41:2 and *Yalkut Shimoni* §69).

These days, we are no longer worthy of Hashem rebuking us through tzaraas. Nevertheless, the Sages teach that if a person notices troubles coming upon him, he should scrutinize his deeds. Hashem is speaking to him (see Berachos 5a).

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Sheva Brachot (Part 8)

*A husband and wife are one soul, separated only through their descent to this world.
When they are married, they are reunited again.*

Zohar HaKadosh

The sixth of the *Sheva Brachot* is: **Gladden the beloved companions as You gladdened Your creature in Gan [the Garden] Eden from times of yore. Blessed are you, Hashem, Who gladdens Chattan and Kallah.**

As with the previous blessing our blessing opens with words that repeat themselves - “*Sameach tesamach*”. And, just as before, the repetition is for emphasis. On their creation, there was no couple more joyful and content than Adam and Chavah. We therefore bless the *Chattan* and *Kallah* that they should experience the same level of intense joy that Adam and Chavah did.

What made Adam and Chavah’s joy so deep and powerful?

One answer that is offered is that, being the very first *Chattan* and *Kallah* in world history, they had no one else to compare themselves to. It did not enter their mind that they may have married the wrong person, or that someone else’s spouse was superior to theirs. Adam and Chavah perceived with absolute clarity that their union was perfect.

Thus, the essence of our blessing is that the *Chattan* and *Kallah* live their lives together knowing that they were meant for each other; that, just like Adam and Chavah, they should build their home in a state of absolute joy – without comparing their marriage to anyone else's.

I once had the privilege to hear the legendary Rosh Yeshivah of *Ateret Yisrael*, Rabbi Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi (1929-2023), speak at a *Sheva Brachot*. He asked why our blessing mentions *Gan Eden*. What, he pondered, is the connection between *Gan Eden* and marriage? As anticipated, he gave one of his signature thought-provoking and brilliant answers:

Our Sages teach that when Hashem brought Adam to *Gan Eden* it was not yet finished; all its potential was extant but unrealized. Everything lay dormant for Adam to begin the process of cultivation so that all the potential could flourish into a true *Gan Eden*. Marriage, said Rabbi Ezrachi, is just like *Gan Eden*. All its potential is extant, waiting for the *Chattan* and *Kallah* to turn it into a veritable *Gan Eden* through their hard work. And as they grow together and strive to build their marriage, the *Gan Eden* that they create develops and flourishes together with them. It takes a lot of continuous work, but for most couples it is an attainable goal.

Rabbi Aryeh Levine (1885-1969) universally known as the “Tzaddik of Yerushalayim” was famous for his constant concern for the poor and sick. He would visit anyone who needed assistance even if they were suffering from a dangerous or a contagious ailment. Together with that, he was also dubbed the “Father of the Prisoners” because of his continual support and visits to the Jewish prisoners during the British Mandate in Jerusalem's Central Prison in the Russian Compound. He loved the prisoners unreservedly, offering them comfort and hope and never judging them. And the prisoners loved him wholeheartedly in return. His empathy and caring for every Jew was extraordinary.

However, it was the bond he shared with his wife that, perhaps, most exemplified his purity of spirit: As the famous story goes, he once accompanied his wife to the doctor. When the doctor asked what the problem was, Rabbi Levine, with complete sincerity, answered: “My wife's leg is hurting **us**.”

A person could think to themselves that our blessing is unrealistic in suggesting that a “regular” couple nowadays could possibly reach the joyful level of Adam and Chavah's union in *Gan Eden*. But according to Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz (*Sichot Mussar*, 5732), there is nothing ridiculous or bombastic about the idea at all. Our blessing, he explains, is a *tefillah* in which we appeal to Hashem that the *Chattan* and *Kallah* reach a level of

marital perfection akin to that of Adam and Chavah's in *Gan Eden*; and one of the purposes of *Tefillah* is to help us strive towards perfection. Our blessing urges the *Chattan* and *Kallah* to utilize their relationship with Hashem to stretch beyond themselves and aspire to reach the highest levels.

To be continued...

PARSHA Q&A

Questions - Tazria

1. When can a woman who has borne a son begin her purification process?
2. After a woman gives birth, she is required to offer what two types of offerings?
3. What animal does the woman offer as a *chatat*?
4. Which of these offerings makes her *tahor* (ritual purity)?
5. Which of the sacrifices does the woman offer first, the *olah* or the *chatat*?
6. Who determines whether or not a person is a *metzora tamei* (person with ritually impure *tzara'at*)?
7. If the *kohen* sees that the *tzara'at* has spread after one week, how does he rule?
8. What disqualifies a *kohen* from being able to give a ruling in a case of *tzara'at*?
9. The appearance of *tzara'at* on the tip of one of the 24 "limbs" that project from the body usually unable to be examined. Why?
10. On which days is a *kohen* not permitted to give a ruling on *tzara'at*?
11. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow (e.g., the head or beard), what color hair is indicative of ritual impurity?
12. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow, what color hair is indicative of purity?
13. If the *kohen* intentionally, or unintentionally, pronounces a *tamei* person "*tahor*," what is that person's status?
14. What signs of mourning must a *metzora* display?
15. Why must a *metzora* call out, "*Tamei! Tamei!*"?
16. Where must a *metzora* dwell?

17. Why is a *metzora* commanded to dwell in isolation?
18. What sign denotes *tzara'at* in a garment?
19. What must be done to a garment that has *tzara'at*?
20. If after washing a garment the signs of *tzara'at* disappear entirely, how is the garment purified?

Answers - Tazria

1. 12:2 - At the end of seven days.
2. 12:6 - An *olah* and a *chatat*.
3. 12:6 - A *tor* (turtle dove) or a *ben yona* (young pigeon).
4. 12:7 - The *chatat*.
5. 12:8 - The *chatat*.
6. 13:2 - A *kohen*.
7. 13:5 - The person is *tamei*.
8. 13:12 - Poor vision.
9. 13:14 - The *tzara'at* as a whole must be seen at one time. Since these parts are angular, they cannot be seen at one time.
10. 13:14 - During the festivals; and ruling on a groom during the seven days of feasting after the marriage.
11. 13:29 - Golden.
12. 13:37 - Any color other than golden.
13. 13:37 - He remains *tamei*.
14. 13:45 - He must tear his garments, let his hair grow wild, and cover his lip with his garment.
15. 13:45 - So people will know to keep away from him.
16. 13:46 - Outside the camp in isolation.
17. 13:46 - Since *tzara'at* is a punishment for *lashon hara* (evil speech), which creates a rift between people, the Torah punishes measure for measure by placing a division between him and others.
18. 13:49 - A dark green or dark red discoloration.
19. 13:52 - It must be burned

20. 13:58 - Through immersion in a *mikveh*.

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

PARSHA Q&A

Questions - Metzora

- 1) When may a *metzora* not be pronounced *tahor*?
- 2) In the *midbar*, where did a *metzora* dwell while he was *tamei*?
- 3) Why does the *metzora* require birds in the purification process?
- 4) In the purification process of a *metzora*, what does the cedar wood symbolize?
- 5) During the purification process, the *metzora* is required to shave his hair. Which hair must he shave?
- 6) What is unique about the *chatat* and the *asham* offered by the *metzora*?
- 7) In the *Beit Hamikdash*, when the *metzora* was presented "before G-d" (14:11), where did he stand?
- 8) Where was the *asham* of the *metzora* slaughtered?
- 9) How was having *tzara'at* in one's house sometimes advantageous?
- 10) When a house is suspected as having *tzara'at*, what is its status prior to the inspection by a *kohen*?
- 11) What happens to the vessels that are in a house found to have *tzara'at*?
- 12) Which type of vessels cannot be made *tahor* after they become *tamei*?
- 13) Where were stones afflicted with *tzara'at* discarded?
- 14) When a house is suspected of having *tzara'at*, a *kohen* commands that the affected stones be replaced and the house plastered. What is the law if the *tzara'at*:
 - a. returns and spreads;
 - b. does not return;
 - c. returns, but does not spread?

15) When a person enters a house that has *tzara'at*, when do his clothes become *tamei*?

16) What is the status of a man who is *zav* (sees a flow):

- a. two times or two consecutive days;
- b. three times or three consecutive days?

17) A *zav* sat or slept on the following:

a) a bed; b) a plank; c) a chair; d) a rock.

If a *tahor* person touches these things what is his status?

18) What does the Torah mean when it refers to a *zav* who "has not washed his hands"?

19) When may a *zav* immerse in a *mikveh* to purify himself?

20) What is the status of someone who experiences a one-time flow?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers - Metzora

1) 14:2 - At night.

2) 14:3 - Outside the three camps.

3) 14:4 - *Tzara'at* comes as a punishment for *lashon hara*. Therefore, the Torah requires the *metzora* to offer birds, who chatter constantly, to atone for his sin of chattering.

4) 14:4 - The cedar is a lofty tree. It alludes to the fact that *tzara'at* comes as a punishment for haughtiness.

5) 14:9 - Any visible collection of hair on the body.

6) 14:10 - They require *n'sachim* (wine offerings).

7) 14:11 - At the gate of Nikanor.

8) 14:13 - On the northern side of the *mizbe'ach*.

9) 14:34 - The Amorites concealed treasures in the walls of their houses. After the conquest of the Land, *tzara'at* would afflict these houses; and the Jewish owner would tear down the house and find the treasures.

10) 14:36 - It is *tahor*.

11) 14:36 - They become *tamei*.

12) 14:36 - Earthenware vessels.

13) 14:40 - In places where *tahor* items were not handled

14)

a) 14:44-45 - It is called "*tzara'at mam'eret*," and the house must be demolished;

b) 14:48 - the house is pronounced *tahor*;

c) 14:44 - The house must be demolished.

15) 14:46 - When he remains in the house long enough to eat a small meal.

16) 15:2 -

a) He is *tamei*;

b) He is *tamei* and is also required to bring a *korban*.

17) 15:4-5 - Only a type of object that one usually lies or sits upon becomes a transmitter of tumah when a zav sits or lies on it. A *tahor* person who subsequently touches the object becomes *tamei* and the clothes he is wearing are also *tmei'im*.

Therefore:

a) *tamei*;

b) *tahor*;

c) *tamei*;

d) *tahor*.

18) 15:11 - One who has not immersed in a *mikveh*.

19) 15:13 - After seven consecutive days without a flow.

20) 15:32 - He is *tamei* until evening.

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