

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Tazria

Tzoraas and the Kohen

אָדָם כִּי יִהְיֶה בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ... לְנֹגַע צָרְעַת וְהוֹבִיֵא אֶל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים

If a person will on the skin of his flesh... an affliction of tzoraas, he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons the kohanim. (13:2)

Why is the treatment of *tzoraas*, a matter that is ostensibly medical in nature, entrusted to the kohanim?

The straightforward answer, says Meshech Chochmah, is that since the condition of *tzoraas* and the recovery therefrom involves bringing the person from a state of *tumah* to *taharah* (purity and impurity), it lies in the domain of the Kohen. Indeed, the Gemara¹ associates *tzoraas* in this regard with the procedure of *parah adumah* (red heifer), which is also entrusted to the Kohen, even though it is technically not a korban, nor are its procedures done in the Beis Hamikdash. Nevertheless, since the *parah adumah* is instrumental in allowing a person to go from a state of *tumah* to *taharah*, it is performed by the Kohen. The same is true for *tzoraas*.

On a deeper level, the Meshech Chochmah explains that although *tzoraas* befalls a person on account of his wrongdoings, it is nonetheless also a contagious disease. Thus, we find that the sages of the Talmud would take care to avoid enclaves where people with *tzoraas* were situated.² Indeed, on a basic level, this is what is behind the Torah's instruction that the *metzora* announce that he is *tamei* as he is leaving the city,³ in order to warn people to keep their distance so that they not catch his *tzoraas*.

In light of this, we will appreciate that whoever treats the *metzora* is effectively exposing himself to danger of contracting *tzoraas*, and will thus be in need of special protection to avoid this occurring. It is for this reason the Torah places the *metzora's* treatment in the domain of the kohanim, for, having been separated from the rest of the people to enter

1 Zevachim 14b.

2 See Kesuvos 77b and Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 16:3.

3 See pasuk 45.

Hashem's domain,⁴ they are subject to a higher level of Divine supervision, and will thus be vouchsafed from harm in their interaction with the *metzora*.

Examining the Metzora

וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הַנִּגְעַ... וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן

The Kohen shall look at the affliction... the Kohen shall look at it... (13:2-3)

The idea of the Kohen seeing the *tzoraas* affliction is mentioned twice in our pasuk. Why the repetition?⁵

The Meshech Chochmah explains that these two phrases actually refer to the kohen looking at two different things:

- ▶ The first phrase refers to examining *the afflicted area* to see if the symptoms are such that will render the person *tamei*.
- ▶ The second phrase, “וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן,” should be translated not “the Kohen shall look at *it*,” but “the Kohen shall look at *him*,” referring to *the person* brought to the Kohen!

The meaning of this second element is that in addition to examining the affliction, the Kohen needs to consider the situation of the person himself before pronouncing him *tamei*. This idea is reflected in the halachah which states that the Kohen does not examine a potential *metzora* either during one of the three *Regalim* festivals, or during the week in which the person got married.⁶ It is not considered appropriate to mar his joy during those times by him being certified as a *metzora*, therefore, the appointment is postponed. The Meshech Chochmah comments that this is an application of the concept of “*Deracheha Darchei Noam* – the Torah’s ways are ways of pleasantness,”⁷ which can find expression even in a case where a person is met with retribution for wrongdoing, nevertheless, the Torah treats him with a certain measure of consideration. Here, too, the person’s situation is met with understanding, and his meeting with the Kohen which could result in him becoming *tamei* is deferred.⁸

4 As the pasuk states (Divrei Hayamim I, 23:13) “וַיִּבְדֵּל אֱהָרֹן לְהַקְדִּישׁוּ קֹדֶשׁ קִדְשִׁים – He (Hashem) separated Aharon to sanctify him as holy of holies.”

5 The Meshech Chochmah notes that this repetition has been commented on by the Toras Kohanim in our parsha (Chap. 2, sec. 8), which explains it to mean that the affliction must be entirely visible to the Kohen at the same time. Therefore, if it was on two sides of his nose or finger, he is not *tamei*.

6 Moed Katan 7b.

7 Mishlei 3:17.

8 One may ask: The halachah, as quoted by the Meshech Chochmah, stipulates that if the timing is not conducive to the person being pronounced *tamei*, his meeting with the Kohen is deferred. If so, why does the pasuk say “וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן” – referring to considering the person’s circumstances after it states “וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הַנִּגְעַ” – referring to his examination of the *tzoraas* itself, given that the

PARALLEL TEACHINGS

Interestingly, the Gemara which discusses the idea that the meeting with the Kohen can sometimes be postponed due to inopportune timing quotes a different pasuk as the source for this ruling. Pasuk 14 of our perek states “וּבְיָוִם הַרְאוֹת בֹּרַח – And on the day that... appears within it,” which the Gemara expounds to mean: “There are [certain] days when you examine and there are [other] days when you do not examine.”⁹ This leads us to a basic question:

Since the Gemara has already established a source for this halachah, what place does the Meshech Chochmah’s “parallel source” in our pasuk have?

The Meshech Chochmah himself addresses this point, and explains that our pasuk states only *generally* that the Kohen must also consider the *metzora* and determine whether he should be examined. However, what qualifies as grounds for non-examination? Seemingly, there could be numerous factors which could mitigate against examination, such as that this person’s emotional constitution requires that he around people and not be quarantined as a *metzora*. Therefore, the pasuk quoted by the Gemara is necessary in order to establish that the criteria for whether or not the Kohen meets the potential *metzora* are *specifically time-based*, i.e. whether this is an appropriate day (or week) to examine him or whether the meeting should be postponed.

However, having established why the pasuk quoted by the Gemara is necessary, let us proceed to ask the converse: why is the Meshech Chochmah’s source necessary? The Gemara’s source seems to have given us the entire picture, i.e., the idea plus its parameters!

Apparently, the Meshech Chochmah is suggesting that the Gemara’s *derashah* on the word “וּבְיָוִם” is in fact *based on our pasuk*. In full, pasuk 14 reads, “וּבְיָוִם הַרְאוֹת בֹּרַח בְּשָׂר חַיִּי וְיָמָא,” and is simply stating that on the day healthy flesh appears in the afflicted patch of skin the person will become *tamei*. The notion that the word “וּבְיָוִם” can also be denoting the idea that there are certain days when the Kohen does not meet a potential *metzora* is derived from our pasuk which states that the Kohen must consider the person as well as the affliction. Having established the principle that there are considerations which can mitigate against the kohen meeting the *metzora*, we can then seek to clarify what factors would influence whether or not the meeting takes place. At this point, we can find the answer in the word “וּבְיָוִם,” i.e., that the broader question of whether to meet is influenced by considerations of timing alone.

In other words, while the *derashah* mentioned by the Gemara (“וּבְיָוִם”) expresses the *practical considerations* of this halachah, the *basis for the principle itself* is to be found in the repetition of “וּרְאוֹהוּ” in our pasuk!

person’s circumstances are considered first in order to determine whether or not the Kohen should examine the affliction?

9 Moed Katan loc. cit.