

PARSHA
TAZRIA
METZORA

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592



THOSE WHO REAP WITH TEARS WILL MERIT
G-D'S HELP

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

The difference that the Torah has established between Parsha Tazria and Parsha Metzora raises some questions: Parsha Tazria focuses primarily on plagues in all their forms – on garments, on the body, and on houses – and it is only the purification of the leper and his offerings that are included in Parsha Metzora. In fact other than in leap years, Parshiot Tazria and Metzora are usually read together because they deal with the same subject. Nevertheless, each has a separate name, and we need to understand why. We may explain this by saying that the first letters of the terms tazria and metzora form the word met (dead). This hints to a person that he should establish time to study Torah and “kill” himself solely for the sake of Torah. As the Sages have said on the verse, “This is the law [Torah]: When a man dies in a tent” (Bamidbar 19:14): “Words of Torah only endure with one who kills himself for it” (Shabbat 83b). This means that when the time comes for learning Torah, we must tear ourselves away from all our useless pursuits, business endeavors, and personal interests in order to sit down and learn Torah as we have planned.

Thus in the names of Parshiot Tazria and Metzora, the Torah is alluding to the establishment of fixed times for learning Torah. The first subject within Parsha Tazria actually alludes to this concept, for the verse, “When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male” (Vayikra 12:2) can be figuratively explained to designate someone who learns Torah and merits finding novel explanations in it – which is what he “conceives” – for these novel explanations allow both him and those who come after him to add further teachings to the Torah. It is similar to one who plants a small seed in the earth, from where it will grow and become a large tree. Numerous are the novel explanations that have been added beginning from a small commentary by Rashi or the Rambam. Sometimes even something we hear from a child is enough to generate numerous new explanations on Torah concepts.

When we examine this subject more closely, this idea is even more fundamental to the second subject that Parshiot Tazria and Metzora focus on, namely the affliction that comes upon those who speak Lashon Harah. In fact Lashon Harah and futile remarks are the absolute opposite of sowing seeds of Torah, for evil words are diametrically opposed to the fertility of Torah and holiness. Hence Scripture takes the initiative by stating that we must establish times for learning Torah and accustoming our children to sowing seeds in the realm to Torah, which will enable them to distance themselves from Lashon Harah. As such, they will never be struck by leprosy.

With this in mind, we can explain why Parsha Shemini is found next to these two parshiot. In fact the term shemini is formed by the same letters as the root of neshama (“soul”). Furthermore, we know that the number shemoneh (“eight”) represents that which is beyond nature, an allusion to the World to Come. This teaches us that a person who wants to lead his soul into the World to Come must establish times for learning Torah; he must “kill” himself for it and sow words of Torah.

We find a useful example of the opposite case in the story of Shelomit bat Divri (Vayikra 24:10-23). The Sages have interpreted the name “Divri” to mean that she was very talkative (dabranit). It is clear she made many people stumble in this way, and as a result, measure for measure, she was rendered impure by an Egyptian. To her son she bequeathed her talkative nature and tendency for uttering useless remarks, instead of raising him in such a way that he sowed words of Torah.

In the end, her son also followed in her footsteps, eventually cursing Hashem and being stoned for it. All this stemmed from a lack of devotion to Torah study, the end result being the sin of Lashon Harah and uttering frivolous words, and sometimes even attacking Hashem, G-d forbid. In this regard we read, “He shall not profane his word” (Bamidbar 30:3). A talmid chacham must never speak profane or futile words, and as our Sages have said, even the everyday conversations of talmidei chachamim should be studied, for they contain useful lessons.

The Appearance of the Maharsha

In his eulogy for the gaon Rabbi Nissim Rebibo Zatzal, Rav Shlomo Amar Shlita (the Rishon LeTzion) spoke about a great gaon by the name of Rabbi Eliezer Di Avila Zatzal, who lived in Morocco. In his youth, Rabbi Eliezer had great difficulty understanding the writings of the Maharsha, something that profoundly upset him, even preventing him from sleeping. Hence he continued trying to understand his writings at night as well. One night, a man suddenly entered the Beit HaMidrash and asked him why he looked so sad. Rabbi Eliezer replied that he had a question about something the Maharsha had written, a question that gave him no rest. The man began to discuss the words of the Maharsha with him, until finally he had fully resolved his question. At that point he disappeared. With this story, the Rishon LeTzion was demonstrating how someone who devotes himself to learning Torah receives Divine assistance.

At the end of the eulogy, an elderly man by the name of Rav Kakoun (a relative of Rabbi Nissim, who had studied with him in his youth) went to speak to the Rishon LeTzion. He told him that Rabbi Nissim had confided in him that when he

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was a young man studying in the Sunderland Yeshiva, he once had difficulty with a commentary from the Maharsha, something that greatly distressed him. He continued studying this commentary for the rest of the night, until finally a man entered the Beit HaMidrash, which would sometimes happen at night. He began to speak with Rabbi Nissim about various issues, until they came to the difficulty posed by the Maharsha's commentary, at which point the man fully resolved his question. Rabbi Nissim was stunned by his explanation

and asked him for his name, at which point he suddenly disappeared! Rabbi Nissim asked Rav Kakoun not to tell anyone about this. Yet now, after his eulogy, the elderly Rav Kakoun felt that he had to tell someone about it. It contained the same lesson as the story told by the Rishon LeTzion, although it took place 100 years later: A person who makes an effort to learn Torah and "kills" himself for it merits special Divine assistance.

The Words of Our Sages

A Reminder from Heaven

It is written, "He shall set the live bird free" (Vayikra 14:7).

In the purification process of the leper described in this week's parsha, we read about the mitzvah of purification: "The kohen shall command; and for the person being purified two live, clean birds shall be taken" (v.4). Here Rashi comments: "Excluding an unclean bird, for leprosy lesions result from Lashon Harah, which occurs by chattering. Therefore for his cleansing, this person is required to bring birds, which twitter constantly with chirping sounds [Arachin 16b]."

We may sometimes hear a story that has happened to people we know, something that contains an allusion from Heaven, though we're not always sure what it means. The Sages teach us how to approach each incident in our daily lives.

Thus the author of Barchi Nafshi tells us the following story: "An avrech who was very troubled came to see me, and he described something that had happened to him a few days earlier. This strange occurrence had given everyone in his family a tremendous scare, and they could think of no way to solve it.

"He said to me, 'A large bird entered our living room. We managed to chase it away, but a minute or two later it returned. We again chased it away, but it returned once more. This went on for the entire day, the day afterwards, and the day after that! It wasn't the bird itself that scared us,' the avrech explained, 'but rather the fact that Heaven was trying to tell us something – and we had no idea what that message was, or what the bird's appearance signified.'

"The avrech continued recounting his story at a feverish pace: 'After a certain time, we thought that we should kill the bird so as to finally rid ourselves of it, as well as the stress that it was causing our family.' When I heard these words from the avrech, I said to him: 'You just told me that it seems this bird has been sent from Heaven – so how can you think of killing it? Will killing it save you from the message that it's bringing you?'"

The Dashboard Light

To what can this be compared? It is like a person who is driving a new car, when suddenly an engine warning light on the dashboard goes on. Given that he just recently purchased this car, he isn't familiar with all its instruments and doesn't exactly know what the light means, or what part of the engine is likely to be damaged as a result. He continues driving, and the light goes off and on repeatedly, more and more frequently, indicating that the problem is getting worse. This irritates the driver, preventing him from driving in peace.

Now, let's pause for a moment and think: If the driver takes a hammer and breaks the light on the dashboard, preventing it from ever going on again, will that solve the underlying problem? There's absolutely

no doubt that the car's condition will get worse! The engine may overheat, for example, until eventually the car is completely disabled, preventing him from driving. Furthermore, ignoring this warning puts all his passengers at risk. The whole reason for the light is to warn the driver that something is wrong with the engine, and the only solution is to stop the car and investigate what's causing it. If he doesn't want to do it himself, he should call a mechanic or have the car brought to a garage where it can be checked.

The Chattering of a Bird

The bird serves as a reminder, even in the case of this avrech. It seems that the bird was sent to him by Heaven to warn him about some spiritual problem that existed in his home. As a result, killing the bird wouldn't help.

"So, what should I do?" the avrech asked, his face fogged with worry.

The author of Barchi Nafshi replied, "The solution to this mystery, which is hidden in the bird's constant appearance in your home, is found in Targum Yonatan. On verse 13, the holy Tanna Yonatan ben Uzziel has difficulty explaining the fact that the Torah commanded the leper to send the second bird away without slaughtering it, as the first bird was slaughtered. He explains that since the leper is punished because of the Lashon Harah he spoke, sending the second bird away is meant to remind him of his sin. If he reverts to his sin by continuing to speak Lashon Harah, the second bird will return to remind him of the serious trauma he experienced as a leper. When he remembers that, he will most likely rectify his deeds and stop disparaging others. The living bird therefore serves as a reminder: If he returns to speaking Lashon Harah, it will return to remind him of it."

When the avrech heard this, he did some soul-searching and agreed with the fact that he had, in fact, spoken Lashon Harah. He then committed himself to rectifying his behavior, after which the bird never returned.

Guard Your Tongue

Very Useful

It is very useful to "demonstrate flexibility," for in addition to being a fine character trait that prompts Heaven to demonstrate flexibility in regards to the sins that we ourselves have committed, as our Sages have said, it is also very useful in preventing us from becoming angry and getting involved in disputes.

– Chovat HaShemirah

In the Footsteps of our Fathers

Don't Lose Your Share in the World to Come

When a dispute involving the mashgiach Rabbi Yerucham Zatzal erupted at the Radin yeshiva, half of the students supported him and half expressed their disapproval.

When news of this dispute reached the Chafetz Chaim, it shook him to his core. He immediately and hastily entered the yeshiva's main hall, where in his bitterness he spoke for two hours on the sin of dissension and Lashon Harah, into which the yeshiva students had stumbled. Among other things, he mentioned what the Rambam states in Hilchot Deot, namely that those who speak Lashon Harah have no share in the World to Come. He told them that he deliberately refrained from discussing this law in his book on Lashon Harah, justifying his decision in the following way: "I did not want to address people with a 'bomb.' Nevertheless, it is the din."

During the same two-hour speech, the Chafetz Chaim cited the teaching of the Sages which states that the first Tannaim gathered together and ruled that King Solomon was also among those who have no share in the World to Come (because the verse states that he did evil in the eyes of Hashem). All of a sudden, a fire emerged and burned the benches on which the Tannaim were sitting, demonstrating that Heaven did not agree with their ruling. Nevertheless, they ignored this sign and gathered once again to make the same ruling, but again Heaven prevented them by means of a celestial voice.

This seems incredible. The Chafetz Chaim asked (as stated in the book *Dugma M'Sichos Avi*): "What does Heaven care about what men say and decide, and why did Heaven go out of its way to intercede with them?" The truth is that since the day the Torah was given to man, permission has been given to the earthly court to issue binding rulings, rulings that will be applied by the celestial court above, for the Torah is not in Heaven. If they had ruled, regrettably, that King Solomon had no share in the World to Come, there would have been no way for him to enter it, despite the fact that there exist numerous arguments to justify his behavior. The Chafetz Chaim concluded by saying the following:

"The same applies to us. In a dispute, each party thinks: 'I'm doing this for the sake of the truth, and since I also diligently study Torah, how can I possibly be distancing myself from the World to Come?' However we must be thoroughly familiar with this Halachah from the Rambam [which states that those who speak Lashon Harah have no share in the World to Come], something which no merit can change. What do you think – that I myself will take sides? Know that despite the love that I have for those who study Torah, I prefer to lose even 70 yeshivot than to enter into the company of those who speak Lashon Harah."

I Just Can't Wait

The gaon Rabbi Avrohom Genichovsk Zatzal, who was among the Rosh Yeshivot of Tshebin in Jerusalem, recounted a trick that he learned in order to avoid listening to Lashon Harah:

A rabbi from America once came to visit the gaon of Tshebin, Rabbi Dov Berish Weinfeld Zatzal. During their conversation, this

guest started recounting the troubles that people from his community were causing him, as well as their numerous faults. At that point in their conversation, the Rav of Tshebin fell asleep!

The guest thought that the Rav had fallen asleep for only an instant, and that he would soon wake up. Hence he waited. Long afterwards, however, upon seeing that Rabbi Dov Berish was still asleep, he said to the Rav's relatives: "I understand that the Rav is old and frail, but I just can't wait for him to wake up." And with that, the guest left.

As soon as he left, Rabbi Dov Berish "woke up." In point of fact, the Rav of Tchebin had never fallen asleep. He just didn't want to hear Lashon Harah, and he hoped that the guest would leave upon thinking that he had fallen asleep.

In the Light of the Parsha

Different Kinds of Leprosy

The verse states, "When you come to the land of Canaan... and I place a plague of leprosy upon a house in the land of your possession" (Vayikra 14:34). Citing the Midrash Rabba, Rashi writes: "This constitutes [good] news for them – that plagues of leprosy will come upon them – for the Amorites had hidden away treasures of gold inside the walls of their houses during the entire 40 years that the Israelites were in the desert, and because of the plague [a person] will demolish the house and find them."

This is surprising. If such a plague resulted from the sin of Lashon Harah and slander, why would a person receive a reward by finding treasures hidden within the walls of his house? He should instead be punished for his sin, not rewarded for it!

It seems to me that we can explain this by saying that there were two kinds of plagues: Some plagues affected houses as a result of Lashon Harah, while other plagues were meant to benefit people by enabling them to find treasures, and it was the kohen who judged and decided.

A person who saw a plague in his house would go see the kohen, who would decide the matter by closing the house and removing its stones. If the plague was due to Lashon Harah and slander, then clearly the plague affecting the house was a punishment, and clearly the person in question did not deserve to find treasures within its walls. Instead, he would be punished by the leprosy afflicting the house and lose his possessions and money when his house would be demolished, all to atone for his sin. Yet when a house was demolished and a treasure was found within its walls, this proved that he was not struck by a malady of the tongue – meaning that he did not commit the sin of Lashon Harah – but rather that he guarded his mouth and his words.

Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, gave a perfect reward by allowing treasures to be found within the walls of houses, in which case it is certain that the destruction of a house was a reward for having guarded one's tongue from speaking evil.

by Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

He is Leprous

It is written, “He is leprous, he is unclean; the kohen shall pronounce him utterly unclean; his affliction is upon his head” (Vayikra 13:44).

The saintly Ohr HaChaim raises a question: Why does the verse state, “He is leprous” rather than – as it has been said up to now – “it is leprosy”?

He explains that the description “leprous” is an adjective that describes the person himself, and as a result is more reprehensible and vile than if the Torah had simply stated “it is leprosy.” As such, the Torah teaches us that this person, because of his evil deeds, is so abhorred by Hashem that He struck him with leprosy.

Other plagues affect a person in hidden places, for Hashem protects the honor of men. Even when they deserve punishment, He punishes them in such a way that they do not become despised by others.

Yet since this person was so abhorred by Hashem, He afflicted him with leprosy in a place where everyone could see it: The front or the back of a bald head, so it becomes obvious to people that he is abhorred by G-d and men.

He is Loved

It is written, “On the day of his purification, he shall be brought to the kohen” (Vayikra 14:2).

In his book *Chomat Anach*, the Chida notes that the term *vehuva* (shall be brought) is formed by the same letters as *veahuv* (is loved).

This contains an allusion to what the Rambam has stated, namely that the penitent had been previously hated by G-d – despised, distant, and held in abhorrence by Him. Yet now that he has repented, he is loved, cherished, close, and a friend.

We find an allusion to this idea in the verse, “On the day of his purification, he shall be brought to the kohen,” meaning that as soon as he has repented, and in addition to his purification, he “is loved.” That is, he is loved by G-d, just like the kohen, for as soon as he repents he is immediately loved by G-d.

His Test

It is written, “The kohen shall go outside the camp, and the kohen shall look; and behold – the plague of leprosy has healed in the leper” (Vayikra 14:3).

Given that everything depends on what the kohen says, the Torah adds a special warning: “Beware of the plague of leprosy, to be very careful and to act. According to everything that the kohanim, the Levites, shall teach you – as I have commanded them – you shall be careful to perform” (Devarim 24:8). From here we derive a Halachah: A leper who removes the signs of his impurity becomes pure, but transgresses the commandment to “Beware of the plague of leprosy.”

The gaon Rabbi Mordechai Epstein noted that from here we learn the gravity of sin. According to the laws concerning the leper, he must remain isolated outside the camp. This is a very difficult decree to bear, for he is separated from his family and relatives, set apart from his friends and acquaintances, and left isolated and alone. And this is in addition to the suffering he experiences from the leprosy itself. Now there is a way for him to alleviate this suffering: He just has to tear away the signs of his impurity and immediately purify himself. Therein lay his test: Will he resist temptation and prefer to suffer in terrible solitude, for an unknown time – possibly for the rest of his life – so as not to transgress a Torah

prohibition? After all, all the suffering that he endures due to his leprosy and solitude does not come close to what he will suffer in the World to Come if he transgresses a Torah prohibition.

For the Shechinah

It is written, “When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as a possession” (Vayikra 14:34).

Rabbi Abba asked, “Is this their reward – that leprosy is found in the houses of those who enter the land?” However he said that it was in order for them to find treasures hidden in their houses, so the Children of Israel would benefit from them. Happy are you, O Israel, who cleaves to Hashem and who is loved by Hashem, as it is written: “I have loved you, says Hashem” (Malachi 1:2).

The Zohar states, “G-d loved Israel and brought them into the holy land to place His Shechinah among them and to make His abode with them, so that Israel should be holy above all other peoples . . . But when the Israelites entered the land, G-d desired to purify them and sanctify the land and prepare a place for His Shechinah, and so through the plague of leprosy they used to pull down buildings which had been erected in uncleanness. Now if they had done so merely that they might find hidden treasures, they would have replaced the stones afterwards. However the text says, ‘and they shall take out the stones . . . and he shall take other mortar,’ in order that the unclean spirit may pass away, that holiness may return, and that the Shechinah may abide in Israel”

(Zohar III:50a).

The Faithful Ones - Accounts from the Tzaddikim of the Pinto Family

He Shall Wash His Garments

As we know, the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us, would usually walk along the streets of the city to give people an opportunity to demonstrate their generosity by giving tzeddakah for the poor and needy.

He would place the money he received in a scarf, which he specifically designated for this mitzvah. After having finished his work, and even before settling down to study, he would usually wash the scarf. When his students asked him why he did this, he explained: “I wash my scarf to rid it of the kelipot [husks] of impurity and the filth of this world. The greatest filth of this world is money, which is why I wash my scarf once I’ve finished distributing tzeddakah.”

Indeed, the Jews of Morocco were fully aware that Rabbi Haim Pinto would wash the scarf with which he collected money for tzeddakah.

Set Aside for the Poor

In this regard, Rabbi Haim was once unable to fall asleep for the night. He immediately got up and said to his wife, “Tell me, did you take any of my money?” She replied, “Yes, I took some of the money that was set aside for the poor in order to purchase what was needed for Shabbat.”

Without any ambiguity, Rabbi Haim explained to her that he wasn’t happy with what she had done: “Because you took money set aside for the poor, a spirit of the filth of this world has entered the house, and its odor is preventing me from sleeping.”

The tzaddik quickly retrieved the money from his wife and hid it away for the poor, at which point he immediately was able to sleep.