

Parshat Tazria and Metzora: Mirror Image

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Why did the Torah specifically designate the *kohen* to determine the status of a *nega* (leprosy spot)?

Tzaraat was not a physical disease but rather a sign of a spiritual malady within the person. For that one needed to go to a spiritual source for help, to a *kohen*. The *kohanim* represent those who teach Torah. They are our spiritual guides. It's difficult for a person to admit his faults. This is why the Torah says, "*V'huva el hakohen*." The *metzora* is brought to the *kohen*. The *kohen* was meant to guide the *metzora* on the path to repentance.

Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz explains the Targum Unkeles which describes the *metzora* as an *adam segira*, a person who is closed in. Often a person with a spiritual illness refuses to listen to other people. Haughtiness is the

quintessential sign of an impure person.

Therefore, the way to respond was, "*V'huva el hakohen*," He must nullify himself before the *tzaddik*. He must recognize his need for guidance.

Rav Pliskin writes that the *kohen* would teach the person how to pray to the Almighty for help. In addition, he himself would pray for the welfare of the person. This is a lesson for all of us. When we are faced with challenges, we must seek out a spiritual guide. We must look for someone who can point out the areas where we need to improve. We must ask for advice about what to pray for and ask him to pray for us too.

The Shaarei Chaim explains that when the *kohen* pronounced the person *tameh* (impure), the pronouncement created the *tumah*

(impurity). The moment the *kohen* pronounced the person impure, the laws of impurity were activated and he could begin fixing himself.

The Noam Elimelech notes that the *kohen* was the spiritual mentor of the people. The names of the different kinds of *tzaraat* wounds indicate the different desires people have to connect to Hashem. Se'eit a person who wants to connect with Hashem, *sapachat* is one who yearns for attachment, *baheret* is one who has a light within him that desires to connect to Hashem. They want to bond with Hashem but it's only external. They don't have the right intentions. These people would also go to the *kohen* to help turn their *avodat Hashem* into something deeper and more meaningful.

Parshas Achrei Mot / Kedoshim: Living Kedusha

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

In Parshat Kedoshim the Torah tells us, "*Kedoshim tiheyu ki kadosh ani*." You shall be holy, for I am holy. How do we define *kedusha* (sanctity)?

The Mikdash Halevi notes that at the beginning of the parsha it says, "*Daber el kol adat bnei Yisrael*." Speak to the entire assemblage. This is to emphasize that each and every one of us is commanded to be holy. We are all enjoined to strive towards *kedusha* by doing *mitzvot*. We don't have to do something above and beyond the extraordinary. Specifically through our everyday encounters and interaction with Hashem and other people we can reach holiness.

At the end of the parsha it says, "*Ushemartem et chukotai ani Hashem mikadeshchem*." If you keep my ordinances and do them, then I will sanctify you. The process begins with a person's own efforts and culminates with Hashem lifting him up.

The Ramban maintains that the concept of holiness is not limited to the observance of any specific category of commandments. Rather, it's an admonition that one's approach to all aspects of life be governed by moderation, particularly with things that are permitted. Someone who only observes the letter of the law can easily become a *naval b'reshut haTorah*, a degenerate with the permission of the Torah. Such a person can observe the technical requirements of the Torah while surrendering to self-indulgence and gluttony. The commandment to be holy tells us, "*Kadesh azmecha b'mutar lach*." Sanctify yourself by refraining from too much of what is permitted. *Kedusha* is about living a life of moderation.

The sefer Sam Derech notes that the end of the Ramban gives us a deeper understanding of *kedusha*. The Torah often gives us specifics and then a general statement. In Devarim there are many different prohibitions of

interacting with people. The Torah then says, "*V'asita hayashar v'hatov*." You shall do deeds that are upright and good in the eyes of Hashem. *Kedusha* is about looking at the totality, the larger scheme. Our actions should be guided by a sense of what is fair and good in Hashem's eyes. How to do so in any given situation depends on the sensitivity of the individual, for it is impossible to spell out all alternatives and situations. "*V'asita hashar v'hatov*" means investigating and trying to understand what the Torah is really asking of us. Being holy means having an understanding of what Hashem wants from us. It's easy to go through life following the strict letter of the law, but *kedusha* demands that we ask ourselves about the larger picture, the background, the sensitivity that Hashem wants us to develop.

The Torah is not just teaching us do's and don'ts. It gives us a rubric on how to transform ourselves as individuals.

Prayer as a Privilege

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Although we often say that prayer is a weapon, we tend to forget that it is also a privilege. When we begin the *Shemonei Esrei* we ask, "*Hashem sefatai tiftach.*" Hashem open my mouth to speak with you. Rav Soloveitchik would say many times that a person needs a license to pray. You have to go through a certain regimen and routine before beginning the quintessential *tefilah*.

Whether it's in the morning with *pesukei d'zimra*, *birchat kariat shema*, and *ga'al yisrael*, or *ashrei* in the afternoon, a person cannot just begin asking Hashem for whatever he wants. You have to get yourself ready and prepare the groundwork for your audience with Hashem.

Prayer is an opportunity. It's not something we can take for granted. Therefore, it's very important to feel humble when we begin to

pray. As David Hamelech says, "*Anochi tolaat v'lo ish.*" I am a worm and not a person. We must stand before Hashem *k'ani b'petach*, like a pauper at a rich man's door. We must know that we are imperfect and that only Hashem can help us.

Sefirat Haomer Liberation of the Mind

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoach Teller

There are two terms for work in Hebrew, *avodah* and *melacha*. The Ramban explains that *melacha* is purposeful work which produces a finished product, while *avodah* is labor that has no defined objective. The term *eved*, a slave, is a derivative of *avodah*. An *eved* is one who works with no goal or accomplishments to show for his efforts. His agenda is that of his master's. When Hashem redeemed the Jews from Egypt he not only freed them from slavery, but from the senseless *avodah* they were forced to do.

The Jews were commanded to erect two cities, Pitom and Ramses. The Gemara teaches that they were built on quicksand. As soon as they were completed, they sunk into the earth. The Egyptians intended to torture and degrade the Jews with senseless labor. When Bnei Yisrael left Egypt they were finally freed of this *avdut*. They gained new purpose and became true servants of Hashem.

Erich Fromm noted, "Freedom without freedom for, is not freedom at all." The *seder*, the feast of liberation, is bound by laws. There are *halachot* about the *matzot*, the *korban pesach*, the wine, and the *marror*. Chazal understood that for one to be truly free there must be a purpose. Otherwise a person becomes enslaved to his passions. On the first night of Pesach we savor the freedom to chart our own destiny. On the next night we

start counting the *omer*, working our way towards the goal of *matan Torah*.

Freedom and discipline are partners. Self-control is achieved by establishing a point of contentment. Chazal say, "*Eizehu ashir hasameach b'chelko.*" A rich man is someone who rejoices with his lot. If we constantly look at others and what they have, we will never be happy.

The Baal Shem Tov told a story of a man who was climbing up a mountain with a heavy load on his shoulder. He looked up at the summit and saw that he was still very far away and he began to feel despondent. The Baal Shem Tov then said, "Instead of looking ahead, look back and see how far you've traveled. That will give you the strength to keep on going."

A person should look inside himself to see who he can become. The happiest people are so busy doing things. They have no time to think if they are happy. One must train oneself to always be joyous and not make it dependent on anything.

Many things happen beyond our control, but you can always control how you will react. The most important component to achieve happiness is gratitude. Gratitude is related to expectation. The more you expect the less grateful you'll be. The less you expect the

more grateful you'll be.

We have the obvious edge. Judaism is based on appreciation. The Gemara says, "*Mishenechnas Adar marbim b'simcha.*" (When Adar comes we increase our joy.) It also says, "*Mishnenchnas av m'mamatim b'simcha.*" (When Av comes we decrease our joy.) The Kotzker Rebbe questions, should it not say *marbim b'aveilut* (mourning is increased)? He explains that the baseline for a Jew is always *simcha* (joy).

Start your day off with gratitude by saying *Modeh Ani* with passion. Say the blessings with intention and train your children to do so too.

The days of *sefirah* are an auspicious time to work on yourself. Avoid comparing yourself to others, and having high expectations. Engage in self-discipline and develop gratitude. May we reach *sheleimut* (perfection) in our *avodat Hashem* (serving Hashem).