

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Metzora 5784

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The Torah continues teaching about the one who is plagued.

וּשְׁתֵּי תְרִים אִו שְׁנֵי בְּנֵי יוֹנָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׂיג יָדוֹ וְהָיָה אֶחָד חֲטָאת וְהָאֶחָד עֹלָה:

“And two turtledoves or two pigeon younglings, that is within his means, and it will be one sin offering and one bunt offering.” (Vayikra 14:22).

This pasuk teaches that one who is a metzora—he or she suffered from tzaraas afflictions—and is then diagnosed as pure, must bring offerings after seven pure days. The Torah says one is for a sin offering and one for a burnt offering. Is this unique to a metzora? Is there something that can be learned about the metzora from these offerings? Was it really the metzora’s sins that caused the affliction?

Unfortunately, it is too wide-spread that one who ails with tzaraas is at fault for being a sinner. It is commonly taught that the metzora attained that status—after having an affliction and then having a kohen diagnose him or her as tameh—due to his or her own sins. The subject sin is often attributed to lashon hara—slander—or other aveiros. However, the Torah does not teach this. Where did such wide-spread teaching come from and is it correct to automatically attribute a sinner status to the metzora?

The first source that tzaraas has a connection to speech is the Torah. Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moshe on account of the Kushi woman (Tziporah) he married. (Bamidbar 12:1). They also derided his prophecy. (Ibid 12:2). They seemed to have spoken only amongst themselves. After Hashem defended Moshe against them, Miriam was struck with tzaraas. (Ibid 12:10). That seems to show that loshan harah leads to tzaraas. However, there are three points disproving that conclusion.

First, lashon hara is lies and slander. What Miriam and Aharon said was to themselves, it was only Motzi Shem Ra. They spoke badly about Moshe but did not slander his reputation and did not lie. They spoke the truth as they thought it. Thus, tzaraas coming from lashon hara is not proven. Second, Aharon also spoke and sinned. Aharon said to Moshe, “Please my master, please do not hold over us this sin which we committed and which we sinned.” (Ibid 12:11). This shows that both Aharon and Miriam were equal in the sin. Yet, only Miriam was afflicted. Thus, the evil speech did not automatically afflict. Third, just because Miriam was afflicted as a punishment, it is a logical fallacy to then infer that every time one talks about another there is tzaraas. It is also a logical fallacy to derive that tzaraas comes only from sin. Sure, she was punished. But disease comes for many reasons.

The second source is the Gemara Bavli. “Rabbi Shmuel Bar Nachmani says in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, for seven sins does tzaraas afflictions come. For lashon hara...” (Arachin 16a). While Rabbi Yochanan is recorded as saying it comes from lashon hara, he

does not say it is the only reason it comes. Further, again, just because these seven sins (including arrogance and stinginess) bring about tzaraas it does not conclusively mean that tzaraas can come for no other reason. Sometimes disease just happens.

In order to resolve this matter, we look at the pesukim. Our pasuk, for instances, seems to imply that there is a sin offering. If so, tzaraas must have come from sin. However, a reading of the pesukim in context will show this to be untrue. Further, if there really were a sin, why would one have to have both, suffering and bring a korban? And even if both were required, why wait for one to be healed? Tzaraas can be leprosy or eczema or some other dermatitis affliction. It can last for years. One may never be healed from it. Yet, the sin offering is only brought at the end of it. That requirement may rob some people of full expiation (forgiveness). Thus, the “sin offering” brought must be for another reason.

Our pasuk says birds are an allowance for one whose means does not allow the giver to bring lambs for the offerings. Such allowance is only made for unintentional sins and for those who are coming back to their normal tahar status. The substitution is made for those who sin unintentionally. (Vayikra 5:7). It is also given for a woman who just had a child. (Ibid 12:8). There is no sin when one goes through childbirth. Further, one who is zav tammeh (gonorrhoea) and even a woman who had her normal cycle bring the same korbanos. (Ibid 15:15 and 29). That nazir also brings the same when he ends his nazirous or is purified from an accidental tameh incident. (Bamidbar 6:10). In each of these cases, the Torah calls it an olah and a chatas – burnt offering and sin offering. Clearly, childbirth, a simple disease, nezirous status, and one’s normal bodily function, do not require sin offerings in the sense that the person was a sinner. Instead, these burnt offerings and sin offerings are more about purifying the soul as it returns to normal tahar status. In each case, a person was tameh for whatever reason, over a period of seven days or longer, and now the person is pure. This token offering is given for their souls and for the bodies. It is as much a mini thanksgiving offering as anything else. Why is it called sin offerings?

They are called sin offerings because of their holiness and the place they are offered. וְשָׁחַט אֶת-הַזֶּבֶחַ בְּמִקְוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁחַט אֶת-הַחֲטָאִים וְאֶת-הָעֹלָה בְּמִקְוֹם הַקֹּדֶשׁ. “And the kohen shall slaughter the lamb in the place that sin-offerings are slaughtered, and the burnt offering in the holy location.” (Vayikra 14:13). The turtledoves or pigeons are offered in place of the lambs. They are connected to the initially prescribed offering, the lamb. The lamb is called a sin-offering as a term of convenience only because it is holy like a sin-offering, belongs to the kohen, and is offered in the location that sin-offerings are offered. “For the guilt offering is like a sin-offering and goes to the kohen, it is most holy.” (Ibid). Thus, these are not offerings to atone for sin. They are offerings to help purify the soul of the one who returns to the tahar status – for several other reasons.

Since the offering is not a sin offering, per se, the metzora is not automatically a sinner. He is a person who was afflicted, for any number of reasons. Sometimes Hashem just wants a person to be afflicted for its own sake and a reason we do not understand. The metzora should not be labeled a sinner. He is a victim and should not be further victimized. Obviously, a known slanderer can be labeled as such to warn others. May He who Heals heal all those that need healing.