

Metzora –Purification of the Metzora

By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

The Torah in Parshiyos Tazria and Metzora devote a lot of space to the subject of Tzaraas. Tzaraas is commonly translated as leprosy but it is emphasized by the great rabbis of all ages that this is not the correct translation or understanding. Tzaraas is a skin condition brought about as a punishment for a number of specific sins but namely Lashon Hara, evil talk. The condition comes about as a result of forbidden speech and goes away with the proper teshuvah, repentance. As the onset and the healing is brought about by one's conduct, tzaraas is a totally non-physical ailment or condition.

In Parshas Metzora, Vayikra 14:1-32, the purification process is described and it is emphasized that it is from the Metzora himself or herself that the healing comes about. To do the purification one needs two kosher birds, cedar wood silk thread and hyssop. The birds symbolize the overuse of the vocal cords as birds are known to chirp constantly. Cedar is said to be the tallest tree, symbolizing the arrogance that caused the condition of Tzaraas as all of the sins that bring tzaraas have some form of arrogance attached to them. The silk thread and hyssop symbolize the new humility brought about by the cure. Silk comes from worms one of the lowliest of creatures and the hyssop is the smallest tree. This is Rashi's explanation of the items used for the curing process of the Metzora. Interestingly, other gigantic trees found throughout the world are related to the cedar. Even the Giant sequoias and redwoods are part of a large family of coniferous trees that include cedars, pines, spruces and firs.

The Sefer Maor Vashamesh points out that that the word *vehenai*, and behold seems superfluous. The Torah should have stated that the Kohen will see the Metzora is healed. He quotes the Ohr Hachaim who also explains that the cause and cure for Metzora are not scientific. In fact, in the case of a Metzora it goes against scientific principles. A metzora has decaying blood and such a condition is usually associated with excessive and sadness and other negative emotions. The natural antidote to such a condition would be to promote happiness and cheerfulness and not isolation as is the punishment of the Metzora.

The Meor Vahshamesh then explains that the cure for the Metzora is based on complete Teshuvah as other meforshim explain. Teshuvah requires a broken heart and a feeling of bitterness over the sin. Being alone gives one the opportunity to reflect over one's misdeeds thoroughly and not be distracted by social interaction. Logically, it would seem that all of this bitterness and sadness should make the condition worse. However, the Maor Vahshamesh explains that breaking one's heart completely actually promotes simchas hanefesh, inner happiness. Because when one truly does complete teshuva, he/she is happy before Hashem. When Hashem assured Moshe Rabbeinu that Aharon will not be jealous of him as younger brother achieving greatness, the Torah states, '*vehenai*, and behold he is going out to meet you and he will be happy in his heart.' True happiness before Hashem means conquering all jealousies as it is understood that Hashem gives everyone what they need and there are no negative feelings about what someone else has. So *Vehehenai*, and Behold is an expression of simcha that comes with true complete Teshuvah.