

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Tazria-Metzora 5786

D. Mordechai Schlachter

Moshe teaches an important lesson through tzaraas.

וְצִוָּה הַכֹּהֵן וְלָקַח לַמִּטְהָר שְׁתֵּי-צִפְרִים טְהוֹרוֹת וְעֵץ אֲרֶז וְשָׁנִי תוֹלַעַת וְאַזְב:

“And the kohen shall command and he shall take for the one being purified, two living and pure birds, cedar wood, and crimson worm, and hyssop.” (Vayikra 14:4).

Who purchases the birds? Why does the Torah have to specify that they are alive and pure? What is and what is the significance of cedar wood, crimson worm, and hyssop?

Hashem does not give gratuitous rituals. Hashem also does not require blood to atone for an impurity. There is no such thing as replacement – this for that – when it comes to avodas Hashem. There is no easy out to righting wrongs and coming close to Hashem. Kill a sheep and you are forgiven. Korbanos only work by having the person be moved by the offering of the korban. The one who brings the korban chatos sees the blood being offered, knows that blood is the life force of a person, so that person is moved to do teshuva. That was the thinking behind the kaparos birds on erev Yom Kippur. The family would be eating a bird for their afternoon meal before fasting. Instead of just shechting it, the custom became to take it as an opportunity to think about the fragility of life. This bird is going to die. Meaning, its life force will be ebbed away from it as the blood drains. I, however, want to go to life. I will repent and seek forgiveness, turn from my evil ways, and hopefully, I will merit life.

The metzora gets infected for a variety of sins. Sometimes, too, Hashem inflicts a person for a lesson, a test of struggle, or as a way to guide the person to turn to Hashem. We do not and we cannot understand all the ways of Hashem. However, the purification process is meant to teach a lesson. The items taken by the kohen are not taken at random.

The kohen has to purchase the goods. (Ibid). The metzora already suffered enough. Further, he is going to have to come out of pocket for korbanos after his seven days of purification. The korbanos are not cheap. It is comprised of two male sheep and a female ewe, along with flour and oil. (Ibid 14:10). Even a poorer person should splurge on a lamb to replace the ewe, but can replace the other two lambs with doves. (Ibid 14:22). On top of that, the metzora also has to shave his or her head, beard, and eyebrows. (Ibid 14:8). Finally, the metzora cannot even hide away in their own house to let the hair grow back. While he or she can enter the camp, he or she must remain outside their own house for an additional seven days. (Ibid).

“And the kohen shall command and he shall take for the one being purified.” This means the kohen goes outside the camp and checks on the metzora. If the person is ready to be purified, the kohen then orders another to fetch him the items he needs. The kohen purchases it with hekdesch money. This is an important lesson that it is on the entire community to help those who are sick to heal. The community should not look upon a

person who is struck with illness, even if it is tzaraas, with frivolous pity and think that the person is some sort of illness on the community. Contrarily, it is public funds that pays for the purification – the kohen going out and the items the kohen uses, while not expensive, does cost some money, is taken up by the community at large. All Yisroel are responsible for one another.

Additionally, being sent outside the camp is not always an embarrassment in it of itself. The one afflicted with tzaraas that covers his entire body, or portions of the body but it appears that it is stable, that person does not go outside the camp. (Ibid 13:13). That is a person with tzaraas that does not even need to leave the camp or be considered impure. Along with tzaraas, those who see abnormal discharges, and any who come in contact with the dead, also have to leave the camp. (Bamidbar 5:2). Leaving the camp was not always because of embarrassment or sin.

The Torah makes a clear distinction between creatures that have flight. When summarizing the animals taken on the teva, the Torah says, “And all birds to their kind, all tzipur and all kanaf.” (Bereishis 7:14). Until then the Torah just said, “every kind of bird (ohf).” Ohf, in the Torah, means winged creature. There are those that we know as birds that can fly, tzipur. And there are those that have wings, kanaf, which would include bats and penguins. The tzipur was not cut up by the Bris Bein Habsarim (Covenant of the Parts). (Bereishis 15:10). Flight was an illusion that Hashem did not want to dispel. Moshe clarifies that you can eat all pure “tzipur.” (Devarim 14:11). Balaam was son of Tzipur – indicating he flew wherever the money took him. Two flying birds are taken as part of the purification. The metzora has to know that he will be able to fly again. This is just a set-back in life. While the blood of one is sprinkled on him, the other is given to fly free showing the vast potential a human has, even after a set-back.

That is also why the birds have to be pure and alive. Obviously pure, because all animals involved in hekdesch have to be pure. But also, obviously alive. There is no initial thought that two dead birds would be brought. The Torah says alive because chayos also means with vigor. It indicates health.

Cedar wood and red worm. Both of these are also used in the purification process corpse-tumeh with the red heifer. (Bamidbar 19:6). The cedar tree grows very tall. It also indicates growth and health. (See ibid 24:6). Red worm is written as worm red when making the Mishkan. (Shmos 26:1, 26:31). Red is also the color of life, of vigor. The Torah switches the order here to emphasize the red not the source of its dye.

Hyssop. This is also mentioned with the Para Aduma. This is also reminiscent of the hyssop dipped in lamb blood of the first korban Pesach. (Ibid 12:22). That blood was not of death but that was a giver of life. This blood/water mixture here is also giving new life and vigor and health to the metzora.

Hashem constantly preaches that we should live by the Torah. Life is precious and life is worth utilizing. There will always be stumbling blocks, and hardships, and tests. However, Hashem desires life. The Torah only teaches that one should live by the Torah, that Torah should help the person live. Even when a person has to be punished or his or her life has taken a hard turn, there is life and vigor and flight around the corner. A healthy attitude is helpful to keeping mind and body healthy.