



PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORAH - YITZCHOK LANDAU

The beginning of Parshas Metzora describes the purification process of the metzora whose diagnosis and subsequent imposed isolation from the rest of the nation, had been described in the previous sidrah. The purification procedure involved bringing two birds, along with cedar wood, a crimson thread and hyssop. Rashi brings various sources which describe the symbolism of these items in the purification process. Firstly, birds which constantly chatter, atone for the sin of *loshon horah* which involves excessive chattering. Secondly, the cedar, being the grandest of trees, represents the arrogance of the metzora which caused him to speak *loshon horah*. Thirdly, the hyssop, a low growing plant, symbolizes the metzora's newfound humility (as does the word used for the thread, along with the source of the pigment used to dye the thread crimson).

Ibn Ezra meanwhile makes a seemingly somewhat strained observation in saying that the purification process described here parallels the procedure of the *korban pesach* offered in Mitzrayim when hyssop was used to apply the blood of the *korban* to the doorposts of each house. We need to understand what Ibn Ezra can possibly be referring to in comparing these two apparently unrelated sacrifices just by virtue of their common use of hyssop as part of their respective procedures.

There is a similarly obscure midrash which states that four of the phrases the Torah uses to describe the *nega* of *tzaraas* - *se'et*, *sapachas*, *baheres* and "*nega tzaraas*" itself - parallel the four kingdoms which have subjugated the Bnei Yisroel since we left Mitzrayim – Bavel, Modai, Yavan and Edom respectively. Once again, it appears to be stretching credulity to compare these two apparently unrelated matters.

In an attempt to achieve a better understanding of these two obscure observations, we need to look at two further midrashim. Firstly, a midrash on this week's parsha states that *tzaraas* comes about as a result of ten wrong-doings, most of which are a result of causing friction between people. One example is of course the sin of *loshon horah*. There are two facets to the punishment of *tzaraas*; one is the pain and upset caused by the *nega* itself. The second is the requirement for the afflicted person to sit in isolation outside all three of the nation's camps. Rashi brings the *gemarah* in Erchin which describes how this punishment is "measure for measure" – the metzora caused a separation or isolation between two friends or a couple, so he himself has to sit in isolation for seven days. Meanwhile, the *gemarah* in Shavuot states that the first aspect of the punishment – the pain and upset – is the beginning of the procedure for forgiveness.

This requirement to sit in isolation outside all three camps is, suggests R' Gedaliah Schorr, a mini or individual *golus* (exile), a microcosm of what we generally understand as the meaning of *golus*, whereby the entire nation is affected. As such, we can begin to see the connection between the *nega* of *tzaraas* and the four national exiles. It is known that the destruction of the second *Beis Hamikdash* and the subsequent exile of the Jews from Eretz Yisroel, was the result of baseless hatred throughout the nation. As with the metzora, this punishment was measure for measure but on a larger scale. The baseless hatred prevalent at the time caused widespread divisions throughout the nation, as a result of which they were divided and scattered throughout the world.

The second midrash we need to look at, relates to the famous episode when Moshe was standing at the burning bush, and one of the signs with which Hashem indicated the future redemption of the Bnei Yisroel, was when his hand became afflicted with *tzaraas*. The midrash, famously quoted by Rashi, says that Moshe was afflicted by *tzaraas* because he had spoken disparagingly about the Bnei Yisroel. The midrash continues with what happened when Moshe put his hand back into his tunic and was immediately healed as the Torah states. The midrash asks what message this represents and answers that Hashem told Moshe to tell the Bnei Yisroel "Go and say to them - Just as a metzora defiles, so do the Egyptians defile you; and just as the metzora becomes purified, so Hashem will one day declare Bnei Yisroel purified".

It is well known that, prior to their redemption from Mitzraim, the Bnei Yisroel were on the second lowest level of defilement – a result of their being totally absorbed within this alien culture. The midrash compares the impurity of Mitzraim to that of a metzora (an interesting side point is the similarity of the words "Mitzraim" and "Metzora") and also refers to Hashem's promise as to His future purification of the Jewish people. How was this promise to be fulfilled? To answer this question we can now refer back to the words of Ibn Ezra and appreciate the beauty of his comparison between the *korban Pesach* of Mitzraim and the *korban* of the metzora. In other words, just as the offering of the metzora was the beginning of his purification process, so too, the beginning of the purification of the Bnei Yisroel in Mitzraim was the sacrificing of the *korban Pesach*, as a result of which – specifically the application of the blood on the doorposts via a sprig of hyssop – Hashem passed over the Jewish houses when carrying out the plague of *Makkos Bechoros*.

There is of course an especially appropriate message in this link between the week's parshios and the recently completed *yom tov* of Pesach, not to mention the period of the Omer during which we commemorate the death of so many of the *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva who did not show sufficient respect to one another. Whilst our current *golus* represents our collective isolation from the rest of Jewish people, the *Yom Tov* of Pesach can be said to represent the beginning of our purification process and it is up to us, in the run up to Shavuot, to emulate our ancestors who, after leaving the depravity of Mitzraim, quickly reached the spiritual level necessary to accept the Torah and eventually to reach Eretz Yisroel, so that we can once again return there together as a Nation purified and united.