

Dvar Torah for Parashiot Tazria and Metzora

By Uriel Pavolotzky

In this week's two Parshiot, Tazria and Metzora, the Torah talks about a form of Leprosy called *tzoraat*, which also makes him *tamei* (ritually impure). The Talmud explains that Tzoraat develops on a person who regularly performs certain specific sins (I will discuss which ones, soon.) The Torah describes that only certain colors render a person *tamei*, and it takes a lot of experience to be able to tell the difference between what is Tzoraat and what is not. But, even if the person has the right (wrong?) color, he does not officially have the laws of the *Metzora (leper) until a Kohen* tells him so. A kohen is the only person authorized to declare a person a *Metzora* and the only person authorized to declare him cured and *tahor* (ritually pure).

Here is how the Torah says it:

אָדָם כִּי-יִהְיֶה בְעוֹר-בְּשָׂרוֹ... וְהוּבֵא אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל-אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים

If a person has in the skin of his flesh...he shall be brought to Aaron the Kohen, or to one of his sons, the Kohanim.

The Torah says that the Kohen is the only person that can say if he has *tzoraatt* and also which type of *tzoraat*, but why can't any other *talmid chacham* (Torah Scholar) do this job? As long as he knows the laws and has experience, he should be qualified!

The Seforno suggests the following. The Kohanim are the ones appointed as a group to be Torah scholars and teach when they are not working in the Temple. So they are the group most likely to know the laws dealing with *tzoraat*. It is better to have a definite group responsible for knowing these laws, rather than opening it up to any Torah Scholar, because the rarity of these situations would make it likely that most Torah scholars would neglect their study. So Hashem picked the kohanim so they will know it's their job and they won't pass the job down to anybody else.

Rabbi Efraim Lunschitz, the chief rabbi of Prague in the 16 century, offers a different explanation in his Torah commentary, *Kli Yakar*. The Talmud says that *tzoraat* comes as a result of the repetition of three specific sins, hinted to in our parshiot: speaking *lashon hara* (negative gossip), being haughty, and pursuing material luxury.

Kli Yakar points out that Aharon exhibited the opposite of these three traits and his descendants, the Kohanim, also represented these traits. The Mishna says that Aharon was a peacemaker with people who were in an argument. This is the opposite of the fighting that *lashon hara* often causes. The Kohanim could teach the person with *tzoraatt* how to communicate better. Kohanim weren't haughty but rather humble. The Talmud says that Moshe and Aharon, about whom Moshe said, "What are we", were more humble even than Avraham who said about himself, "I am but dust and ashes". The third and last sin from which one can get you to have *tzarahat* is love of luxury, but the Kohanim in biblical times owned no land, and lived simply. They received their food from the agricultural gifts of the farmers. They would be able to model to the *metzora* how one can be happy living a simpler life.

I hope you enjoyed my devar torah! We shouldn't speak *lashon hara*, be haughty or be too much in love with money. Shabbat Shalom.