**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**student summaries of *Sichot* of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashot tazria-Metzora**

**Sicha of HarAV Mosheh Lichtenstein**

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**Dedicated in memory of**

**אפרים בן משולם זושה ז"ל**

**Efrom Lebow**

**Whose yahrtzeit is on 30th of Nisan**

**By Randi and Alan Gelman**

**Raanana**

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**Two Paths to Repentance**

Adapted by Binyamin Fraenkel

Translated by David Strauss

**A Metzora’s Purification Process**

In this week's *parasha,* we encounter the *metzora,* a person who has contracted the condition known as *tzara’at* (which we will explain below), who is declared impure and distanced from society.

What is the purification process that the *metzora* must undergo once the signs of *tzara’at* have cleared up and the priest declares him ready? The Torah describes an extraordinary procedure:

And he that is to be purified shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and bathe himself in water, and he shall be pure; and after that he may come into the camp, but shall dwell outside his tent seven days. And it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off; and he shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and he shall be pure. And on the eighth day he shall take two he-lambs without blemish, and one ewe-lamb of the first year without blemish, and three tenth parts of an *eifa* of fine flour for a meal-offering, mingled with oil, and one *log* of oil…

And the priest shall take of the blood of the guilt-offering, and the priest shall put it upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be purified, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the big toe of his right foot. And the priest shall take of the *log* of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. And the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle of the oil with his finger seven times before the Lord.

And of the rest of the oil that is in his hand shall the priest put upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be purified, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the big toe of his right foot, upon the blood of the guilt-offering. And the rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put upon the head of him that is to be purified; and the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord. And the priest shall offer the sin-offering, and make atonement for him that is to be purified because of his impurity; and afterward he shall kill the burnt-offering. And the priest shall offer the burnt-offering and the meal-offering upon the altar; and the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be pure. (*Vayikra* 14:8-20)

What is the meaning of the placement of the blood and oil on the tip of the *metzora*'s ear, on the thumb of his hand, and on the big toe of his foot? Already ibn Ezra notes several points of similarity between this ceremony and another event in the history of the people of Israel:

"On the tip of the ear" — its meaning may be understood from its place. One who is being purified from *tzara’at* which is in the body is like a priest who is being consecrated, for sin is like *tzara’at* of the soul. Now the thumb is the place of connection, it being the most important part of all actions; and it is the right one, because of the power of the right side; and the tip of the ear is a reminder to listen to what has been commanded.

Ibn Ezra connects this ceremony to the consecration of the sons of Aharon and their induction into the priesthood. This is not just another appointment — Aharon and his sons are transformed from Israelites into priests, as they accept upon themselves the sanctity of the priesthood.

**Repentance – Building a New Identity**

Ibn Ezra appears to be alluding to a deep and meaningful point: that the consecration of Aharon and his sons and the purification of the *metzora* are directed toward the same goal, namely, the remaking of a person's identity. What we have here is a sort of rebirth, which explains the order of *Parashat* *Tazria-Metzora*, as Chapter 12 of *Vayikra* deals with the laws of purity and impurity after childbirth, Chapters 13-14 deal with the laws of purity and impurity related to *tzara’at,* and only in Chapter 15 does the Torah address others who experience periods of bodily purity and impurity associated with the reproductive cycle.

This rebirth expresses a fundamental process of repentance, the basic metamorphosis of a person, as explicitly mentioned by the Rambam at the end of *Hilkhot Tumat Tzara'at* (16:10; emphasis mine):

*Tzara'at* is a collective term including many afflictions that do not resemble each other. For the whitening of a person's skin is called *tzara'at*, as is the falling out of some of the hair of his head or beard, and the change of the color of clothes or houses.

This change that affects clothes and houses which the Torah described with the general term of *tzara'at* is not a natural occurrence. Instead it is **a sign and a wonder prevalent among the Jewish people** to warn them against *lashon ha-ra* (evil speech). When a person speaks *lashon ha-ra*, the walls of his house change color. If he repents, the house will be purified. If, however, he persists in his wickedness until the house is destroyed, the leather items in his house upon which he sits and lies change color. If he repents, they will be purified. If he persists in his wickedness until they are burnt, the clothes he wears change color. If he repents, they will be purified. If he persists in his wickedness until they are burnt, his skin undergoes changes and he develops *tzara'at*. This causes him to be isolated and for it to be made known that he must remain alone so that he will not be involved in the talk of the wicked which is folly and *lashon ha-ra*…

Therefore, a person who seeks to structure his course of conduct should distance himself from their gatherings and from speaking to them **so that he will not become caught up in the web of their wickedness and foolishness.** This is the path followed by the gathering of wicked fools: In the beginning, they speak excessively about empty matters… As a result of this, they come to speak negatively of the righteous… As a consequence, they will become accustomed to speaking against the prophets and casting aspersions on their words… And this would lead them to deny God's existence entirely…

In this vein, it is stated: "They set their mouths against Heaven and their tongues strut on earth" (*Tehillim* 73:9). What caused them to "set their mouths against Heaven"? Their tongues which previously were given free reign on earth. This is the speech of the wicked that is caused by loitering on the streetcorners, frequenting the assemblies of ignoramuses, and spending time at the parties of drunkards.

In contrast, **the speech of proper Jewish people** only concerns words of Torah and wisdom. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, assists them and grants them merit because of it, as it is stated: "Then those who fear the Lord conversed, each person with his fellow, and the Lord listened and paid heed. And a book of remembrance was composed before Him for those who fear the Lord and contemplate His name" (*Malakhi* 3:16).

The Rambam speaks here not of a person afflicted with *tzara’at*, but rather of an absolutely wicked man, who wallows in sin. His words here echo what is stated in *Hilkhot Teshuva* (7:6):

Repentance is great for it draws a man close to the *Shekhina* (Divine Presence) as it is stated: "Return, O Israel, to the Lord, your God" (*Hoshea* 14:2)…

That is to say, if you will repent, you will cling to Me. Repentance brings near those who were far removed. **Yesterday**, this person was hated by God, disgusting, far removed, and abominable. **Today**, he is beloved and desirable, close, and dear.

He goes on to say (7:7):

How exalted is the level of repentance! **Yesterday**, the [transgressor] was separate from God, the Lord of Israel… He would call out [to God] without being answered… He would fulfill *mitzvot*, only to have them crushed before him…

**Today**, he is clinging to the *Shekhina*… He calls out [to God] and is answered immediately… He fulfills commandments and they are accepted with pleasure and joy… Moreover, [God] desires them, as it is stated: "Then, shall the offering of Yehuda and Yerushalayim be pleasing to the Lord as in days of old and as in the former years" (*Malakhi* 3:4).

In one day, a person undergoes a revolutionary change, a total upheaval — from "hated by God, disgusting, far removed, and abominable," he is transformed into "beloved and desirable, close, and dear."

**Repentance – Gradual Progress**

The Gemara in *Yoma* (85b-87b*)*, on the other hand, presents a different model of repentance, a model displaying slower and more measured movement and describing evolutionary change.

One who undergoes such a change may immerse in a *mikve* in order to purify oneself and thereby experience a kind of rebirth — not the type that takes only a few days, but rather the sort that requires a complex process. This model relates not to an inveterate sinner, but to a person who occasionally slips and strays.

He brings a sin-offering for his slips and missteps, but not a guilt-offering, which according to the Ramban, is cast upon a person who sins with full deliberation.

The Ramban (*Vayikra* 5:15) distinguishes between a sin-offering (*chatat*) and a guilt-offering (*asham*) in a manner very similar to the way we have distinguished between the two paths of repentance:

What appears correct to me, is that the term "guilt-offering" indicates a grave matter for which the person who does it deserves to become desolate and lost… Whereas the term "sin-offering" indicates a matter by way of which the person strayed from the path, in the sense of "[every one could sling stones] at a hairsbreadth, and not miss )*ve-lo yachati*)" (*Shofetim* 20:16).

We see, then, that the Torah presents us with two models of change, a sin-offering versus a guilt-offering, a *mikve* versus the purification process of a *metzora*. Each model suits a different type of person. It must always be remembered that apart from the case of an inveterate sinner, the desired path is step-by-step progress, gradual advancement in stages, without revolutionary and rapid changes.

(This *sicha* was delivered at seuda shelishit on *Shabbat Parashat Metzora* 5775 [2015.])