YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**Rav Meir Shpiegelman**

**PARASHAT TAZRIA**

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This shiur is dedicated in memory of Rabbanit Frieda Heller z"l
whose yahrzeit falls on the third of Iyar,
by her granddaughter, Vivian Singer.

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**The Purification of the *Metzora***

**The *Metzora* and Others in States of Impurity**

At the beginning of *Sefer* *Bamidbar*, the Torah instructs that those who are in a state of *tum’a* (ritual impurity) must be removed from the camp:[[1]](#footnote-1)

Command Bnei Yisrael that they put out of the camp every *metzora* and every *zav* [one who experiences a discharge], and whoever is *tamei* (impure) by [contact with] the dead. (*Bamidbar* 5:2)

The *parashot* of *Tazria* and *Metzora* describe the processes by which a *metzora* and a *zav* contract their impurity and later undergo purification, but the obligation of distancing from the camp is mentioned only in connection with the *metzora*, not the *zav*. Similarly, in *Parashat Chukat*, which sets forth the conditions under which one contracts *tum’a* from a dead body and the processes for purification, there is no mention that *teme’im* of this category are distanced from the camp. Why does the Torah mention this distancing only in relation to the *metzora*?

We might suggest two reasons for the obligation to remove *teme’im* from the camp. On one hand, this law may arise because of the status of the camp: if someone who is *tamei* enters the camp, the entire camp becomes *tamei*; to avoid this possibility, the person who is *tamei* is distanced. On the other hand, this law may be part of the system of laws pertaining to those who are in a state of *tum’a*, in that those who are impure are not fit to be part of the holy camp. From this perspective, the obligation of distancing the impure individual arises not from the risk of him causing the camp to become *tamei*, but rather from his very status of impurity.

It seems that these two reasons embody the difference between the *metzora* and other categories of impurity. At the beginning of *Sefer Bamidbar*, the Torah describes the formation of the camp of Israel. As part of the laws for this camp, *teme’im* must be distanced so as not to cause the camp to become *tamei*. It is impossible to establish a camp that is ritually pure (*tahor*) while impure individuals are within it.[[2]](#footnote-2) In the *parashot* of *Tazria* and *Metzora*, however, the Torah is not discussing the law of the camp, but rather the law pertaining to the *teme’im* themselves – and within this context, it is only the *metzora* who is unfit in himself to be included within the camp. The *metzora* must remain alone, with his hair disheveled, owing to his *tzara’at*, and he must also leave the camp.

Why is there such an essential difference between the *metzora* and the other categories? Why is someone who is *tamei* *met* (impure because of contact with a dead body) or a *zav* entitled, in principle, to appear before God, while a *metzora* is not?

**Purification Procedures**

The regular procedure for purification in the Torah includes two actions: immersion in a *mikveh* and washing one’s clothes. There are four categories of impurity that require an additional action to complete purification: the *yoledet* (woman who has given birth), the *metzora*, the *zav*/*zava*, and the *tamei* *met*.[[3]](#footnote-3) The manner of purification for each of these categories is different:

1. *Metzora* – Two-stage purification process. The *metzora* brings two birds, then waits seven days (during which time he may enter the camp), and then brings other sacrifices.
2. *Zav*/*zava, yoledet* – All wait seven days outside the camp after being purified of their *tum’a;* they may not enter the camp during this time. Afterwards, they bring a sacrifice.
3. *Tamei met* – Waits seven days outside the camp, during which time he is sprinkled with the “waters of *chatat*” (water mixed with ashes of the *para aduma*). Following this, he may enter the camp and is not required to bring a sacrifice.

**Preparing for Entry into the Camp**

The camp of Israel is holy, because God is in its midst. This is how the Torah explains the need to remove *teme’im* from the camp:

Both male and female [of the previously mentioned categories of *teme’im*] shall you put out [of the camp]; outside of the camp you shall put them, that they not defile the camp in the midst of which I dwell. (*Bamidbar* 5:3)

Why must *teme’im* wait seven days outside of the camp? It seems that a seven-day wait is required for anyone whose status of ritual purity changes. In a similar way, during the inauguration of the *Mishkan*, the *kohanim* had to spend all seven days inside the *Mishkan*, as part of their process of sanctification.[[4]](#footnote-4) Thus, a person who is *tamei* must wait seven days before regaining his status of ritual purity, which explains the Torah’s instruction concerning purification of the *zav*:

And when a *zav* is purified from his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven days of his purification, and wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in living waters, and shall be purified. (*Vayikra* 15:13)

Even after the *zav* is purified, his status does not change; the process is completed only after seven days have passed.

Since the camp of Israel is holy, those who are impure may not reside within it until they undertake certain actions which render them fit to re-enter the camp.[[5]](#footnote-5) However, this preparation is needed only when the individual has become ritually impure on account of himself. When he contracts impurity from an outside source – for instance, by touching a creature that is *tamei* – his personal status does not change, and therefore he is not required to undertake special actions in order to regain a status of ritual purity. This person immediately re-attains a state of purity after seven days, without having to do anything else.

The actions that *teme’im* must undertake as part of their purification consist of two types: there are actions that render them fit to re-enter the camp, and actions that render them fit to enter the *Mishkan*. Bringing sacrifices, for example, is an action that prepares the personfor entering the *Mishkan*, since it is an action that is intimately connected with the *Mishkan*.

**The Unique Nature of the *Tum’a* of the *Metzora***

*Chazal* describe the *zav* and *zava* as having “their impurity emerge from their bodies” (*Nidda* 32a and elsewhere). The significance of this is that they themselves are a source of impurity in the world: they emit an discharge that is impure, thus they themselves are ritually impure.

Although the *tum’a* of the *metzora* is more severe than that of the *zav*, the *metzora* is not considered as having “impurity emerge from his body.”[[6]](#footnote-6) The impurity of the *metzora* is impurity *of* the body, not impurity that issues *from* the body. As proof of this, let us consider the similarity between the laws of the *metzora* and the laws of the mourner (since *Chazal* teach that “a *metzora* is considered as someone who is dead”[[7]](#footnote-7)): the *metzora* leaves his hair disheveled, like a mourner, as he is mourning for himself. He therefore remains alone, outside the camp, like the living dead. Indeed, *tzara’at* is not a disease like any other human illness: it renders even clothing and houses ritually impure; it does not affect the person, but the outer body – not the “*gavra*” but the “*cheftza*.” As such, the *metzora* is different from other *teme’im*: the *zav* is rendered impure by *tum’a* that issues from his body and the *tamei* *met* is rendered impure because he came into contact with a dead body,[[8]](#footnote-8) while in the case of a *metzora*, his own body has become “dead.”

The *metzora* must first of all repair the body that has turned, as it were, into a corpse. Without such repair, he cannot rejoin the camp and cannot begin the process of purification. The *zav*, in contrast, may start the process of purification immediately upon the cessation of the discharge, since his *tum’a* arises from it; the *tamei* *met* may likewise commence the process of purification immediately. Before starting on his own process of purification, the *metzora* must bring two birds (which are not a sacrifice, and therefore they are not turtledoves or doves, and a *kohen* is not needed to prepare them), in order to remove the definition of “death” from his body. After he has brought the birds, the body of the *metzora* is purified and his status changes. From that moment, he is no longer defined as a *metzora*, and he may enter the camp.[[9]](#footnote-9) The process of purification is complete after seven days, when the *metzora* brings his sacrifices, which permit him to enter the *Mishkan*.

**The Purification of the *Tamei* *Met***

The system set forth above encounters a problem when it comes to the *tamei* *met*. So long as he is *tamei*, he may not enter the camp, but in order to undergo purification he needs to bring a sacrifice – and the sacrifice must be brought to the Sanctuary. To solve this problem, the Torah commands the *tamei* *met* to bring an “external sacrifice” – the ashes of the *para aduma*, which is a sacrifice that is offered outside of the camp.[[10]](#footnote-10) The Torah defines the *para aduma* as a sacrifice: it is called a “*chatat*” (sin offering), it is performed only by a *kohen*, and its blood is sprinkled towards the Tent of Meeting. Since the *para aduma* is a sacrifice, someone who is *tamei* cannot offer it; therefore, the purification is not effected through the sacrifice of the *para aduma* but rather by the sprinkling of the water mixed with its ashes on the person requiring purification.

In summary, the *tamei* *met* brings an external sacrifice since he moves all at once from outside the camp to inside the *Mishkan*. The *zav* moves in two stages, and therefore he is entitled to enter the camp after the first stage; he then brings a sacrifice, which permits him to enter the *Mishkan*. The purification of the *metzora* consists of three stages: first he must remove his definition as a “dead person” by means of the two birds; then he waits seven days; and eventually, he brings his sacrifices. The *metzora* is unique in that his own body is defined as “dead,” and therefore his is the only category of *tum’a* prohibited from entering the camp on account of himself. Only after his definition as “dead” is removed may he rejoin the camp of Israel.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish; edited by Sarah Rudolph)

1. Halakha defines three concentric “camps” around the Sanctuary, and different levels of *tum’a* (as per the different categories of *teme’im*) are removed from one, two, or all three camps. However, it seems that in the wilderness, anyone who was *tamei* was removed from all three camps because of the Divine Presence in their midst, as the Netziv explains (ad loc.). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is also for this reason that a *sota* is removed from the camp. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The purification of the *yoledet* is very similar to that of the *zava*, but there are some differences. The Torah does not set forth the law of the *yoledet* immediately after that of the *zava*, but rather as a law on its own. In addition, the *yoledet* brings a sheep as a burnt offering, while the *zava* brings a bird. However, below we shall treat the impurity of the *yoledet* and of the *zava* as a single category. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Similarly, while the *korban pesach* is sacrificed only on one day, the Torah commands eating *matza* for seven days: “You shall not eat *chametz* with it; for seven days you shall eat *matzot* with it” (*Devarim* 16:3). In another example, Moshe’s personal status also changes in the wake of the giving of the Torah, and God calls to him only on the seventh day. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In fact, the inverse is also true: when someone is distanced from the camp, he is ritually impure because of being outside of the camp of Israel. I hope to address this point in a different *shiur*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Next week’s *shiur* will deal with these definitions in greater detail. See also my article in *Ma’alin ba-Kodesh* regarding levels of purity. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Shemot Rabba* 1:34. As proof, *Chazal* cite Moshe’s words to Miriam, who is struck with *tzara’at*: “Do not [let her] be like one who is dead…” (*Bamidbar* 12:12). In view of the above, it is possible that *Chazal* deduce the principle from the striking similarity between the law of the *metzora* and the law concerning contact with the dead. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. It can be shown that the *tum’a* of a dead body is not transferred from the corpse to the person who touches it, but rather is created as a result of the contact itself. I hope to discuss this subject in a different *shiur*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The status of the *zav* changes only *after* seven days, and therefore he may not enter the camp throughout the seven days of his purification. I shall not elaborate at length here on the difference between the *metzora* and the *zav* that explains why the status of the *metzora* changes immediately while that of the *zav* changes only after seven days. Suffice it for the moment to say briefly that it depends on the manner in which the *tum’a* was contracted: whether the person experienced a discharge or came into contact with a dead body, or whether by some other circumstance. It must also be remembered that the *metzora*, too, does not fully rejoin the camp during the seven days, since he may not enter his tent during this time. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The *tum’a* of those who handle the *para aduma* is caused by the fact that it is an external sacrifice; any sacrifice that is brought outside of the camp causes *tum’a*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)