YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

**Parashat Metzora**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch Gigi**

**The Good Tidings Brought by the *Metzora'im***

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction**

In the *haftara* for *Parashat Metzora*, we are told about a huge miracle that occurred in the days of Yoram the son of Achav. At the time, the people of Israel were besieged by Aram and were suffering a severe famine in Shomron. All these troubles disappeared, however, when God miraculously caused the Arameans to flee.

The good news reached the people of Israel by way of a group of four *metzora'im*, sitting outside the city, who came to the camp of Aram and saw that it had been abandoned. At first, they ate and drank, and took some of the gold and silver that had been left behind for themselves. But when they came to their senses, they decided to share their discovery:

And they said one to another: We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace. If we tarry till the morning light, punishment will overtake us; now therefore come, let us go and tell the king's household. So they came and called to the porters of the city, and they told them, saying: We came to the camp of the Arameans, and behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but the horses tied, and the donkeys tied, and the tents as they were. (II *Melakhim* 7:9-10)

This redemption did not come about through the king, but proceeded under unusual conditions, the king hesitating all the time and fearing that it was a deception. Even when he relented and his men entered the Aramean camp, it was done without order and organization. The captain in charge of the gate was trampled in the rush of the crowd, and only in the end was God's salvation revealed – as Elisha the prophet had foretold.

**The Good Tidings Brought by the *Metzora'im***

The fact that the good tidings were brought specifically by *metzora'im* indicates that this salvation was not perfect, and only came to Israel to prevent complete destruction, God forbid. It came into the world because of the covenant with the Patriarchs: "But the Lord was gracious to them, and had compassion on them, and turned to them, because of His covenant with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and would not destroy them; neither has He cast them from His presence until now" (II *Melakhim* 13:23). This verse, which is appended to the *haftara* according to the Yemenite tradition, is taken from several chapters later, from a description of Aram’s repeated attacks and God's mercy on His people, whom He did not wish to destroy.

In her poem *Yom Besora*, "Day of Tidings," Rachel the Poetess writes:

In the days of yore, the terrible enemy / brought Shomron under siege; / four lepers brought her good tidings. / They told her the good tidings of liberation. // As Shomron is under siege – the whole entire land, / and the famine is unbearably heavy. / But I do not desire tidings of salvation, / if it comes from the mouth of a leper. // Let the pure bring tidings and the clean redeem, / and if he is unable to redeem – / then I prefer to fall from the distress of the siege / on the eve of the day of the great tidings.

What is the reason for this refusal to accept good news from the mouth of a leper? What is wrong with good tidings brought by a *metzora*? Why is Rachel ready to accept the news only from the mouth of a pure person?

When a rescue is performed in such an extreme reality – when the people are not truly worthy of it, when the king is Yoram the son of Achav (not exactly the righteous son of a righteous man), when the famine is exceedingly severe – it lacks excitement and joy. It resolves the problem, but it does not really reflect God's shining His face on His people. This is also evident in the lack of order in the course of events. Therefore, even though the people were saved, it was not in happy circumstances. If anything, it can be said that this was not just a case of tidings from the mouths of lepers, but of a "leprous tiding."

Nevertheless, given the difficult circumstances that the people were in, even such a salvation had a degree of blessing in it, and it is hard to disregard it.

**To Be Worthy of Redemption**

There is room to develop another perspective on the tidings brought by the *metzora'im*, in light of a careful study of the sections dealing with *tzara'at* in the Torah.

The Torah sets leprosy of the house apart from the other types of leprosy, placing it in *Parashat Metzora* while the others all appear in *Parashat Tazria.* Many explanations have been suggested for this phenomenon. *Chazal* emphasized three of them:

1. The sin of *tzara'at* is closely connected to *lashon hara* (evil speech), as we learn from Miriam and Aharon who spoke ill about Moshe – after which Miriam was struck with *tzara’at* – and the verses in *Parashat Ki-Tetze*: "Take heed regarding the plague of leprosy… Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam" (*Devarim* 24:8-9). Separating *tzara'at* of the house apart from the other types teaches us that God first punishes a person with his house, and only afterwards in his clothing and body. The “tiding” of the leprosy of houses is a mercy that God shows His people, offering a chance before striking at them directly. This mercy also finds expression in the fact that all of the house's contents are removed from the house before the priest arrives, so they will not be declared impure and cause the individual a greater loss.

2. Regarding leprosy of the house, *Chazal* emphasized another element in addition to *lashon hara*. They pointed to the sin of stinginess, which may lead to one’s house being afflicted with leprosy; this phenomenon brings “tidings” to the person that he should repair his ways, and learn the secret of the seed of Avraham, welcoming guests and performing acts of kindness.

3. Rashi cites here the words of *Chazal* – the good news is that they will discover the treasures that Canaanites had buried in the walls of the houses in the hope that one day they would return: God brings the plague of leprosy, the house is demolished, and the great treasure is revealed. According to this approach, *tzara'at* is not a punishment for sin; on the contrary, it comes to reveal hidden treasure. At first glance, a plague has appeared on the walls of one's house, but it then becomes clear – from a distance – that God has appeared to the person (see *Ba'al ha-Turim*, *Vayikra* 14:35). Leprosy is then simply God's means for illumination and deliverance; the revelation of the treasures is a permanent promise that the nations will not return. The *metzora'im* in our *haftara*, too,who had been sitting at the entrance of the gate, suddenly revealed that their sitting there was in fact for the sake of redemption; "this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace?"

The common denominator in the perspective of the Sages regarding leprosy of the house is God's providence over His people, that God sets His eyes on Israel, for better or for worse. As Shlomo wrote: "For whom the Lord loves, He corrects" (*Mishlei* 3:12). Sometimes His “look” is punishment for sin, such as *lashon hara* or stinginess, and sometimes it is to benefit His people and reveal treasures to them. Just as God's eyes are set on His land – "a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even to the end of the year" (*Devarim* 11:12) – so they are set on His nation, in His love for them, sometimes for punishment and sometimes for kindness, as is the way of the relationship between parents and children. It is all out of the great love that God has for His people.

The Land of Israel is demanding, living before God is binding, and every slight deviation imposes liability. Two principles are learned from living in the Land of Israel: the high moral demands placed on Israel, and the grace that God showers upon His people.

Ultimately, even though there is always hope that salvation will come with God's shining face, and that we should be worthy of it, nevertheless, God does not abandon His people; even when they are not worthy, He rescues them. Even in redemption that is not perfect, there is salvation and hope.

The demand made of the people of Israel is great, as children of the living God, and from a deep and comprehensive perspective: "From afar the Lord appeared to me" (*Yirmeyahu* 31:3).

[This *sicha* was delivered by Harav Gigi on Shabbat *Parashat Tazria-Metzora* 5781.]