**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT TAZRIA**

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This shiur is dedicated to the refua sheleima of our alumnus

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Motzaei Shabbat

Parashat Tazria begins by presenting several laws that apply after a woman delivers a child, including the *mitzva* of *berit mila*: “On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be removed” (12:3).

The Gemara in Masekhet Shabbat (130a) cites in reference to the *mitzva* of *berit mila* the verse in Tehillim (119:162), “*Sas anokhi al imratekha ke-motzei shalal rav*” – “I exult over Your staements, like one who comes upon a vast amount of spoils.” This verse, the Gemara comments, was said by King David to express the special joy he experienced when contemplating the *mitzva* of *berit mila*, the sign of the covenant with God permanently imprinted on his body.

Rav Yitzchak Pinchas Goldwasser, in his [*Mei Zahav*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=46472&st=&pgnum=360), notes the significance of the comparison drawn here by the Gemara between circumcision and “*shalal*” – a term used primarily in reference to spoils of war. A triumphant army enjoys the riches seized from its defeated opponents only after a long, grueling battle, and often after suffering injury and trauma. “*Shalal*” is not something which somebody chances upon effortlessly and without sacrifice; it is earned only after enduring a difficult period of hardship. And this might very well be the symbolic message of circumcision. Our covenant with God is formally established with an experience of pain and sacrifice, to indicate that the great benefits of this special relationship often require a degree of hardship and selfless devotion. Of course, pain and suffering are not viewed as an ideal. However, the experience of circumcision instructs that we cannot expect our status as God’s treasured nation to always be simple and smooth. It requires hard work and sacrifice.

King David elatedly proclaimed, “*Sas anokhi al imratekha ke-motzei shalal rav*.” He rejoiced over God’s commands even as he recognized that they are “*shalal*,” that they often entail difficult “battles,” struggles and sacrifices. We cannot expect *mitzvot* to always be easy, and we must not allow the complexities and challenges of Torah life to diminish from our joy and sense of fulfillment over the privilege we have to live such a life.

Sunday

The Torah in Parashat Tazria introduces the laws of *tzara’at*, the skin discoloration which could, depending on numerous conditions, render a person ritually impure. It is clear from the Torah’s presentation that the determination of such a person’s status is made only by a *kohen*. A person does not become a *metzora* unless a declaration to this effect is made by a *kohen* after an inspection of the discoloration is made.

The Mishna in Masekhet Moed Katan (7a) cites a debate among the *Tanna’im* as to whether a person with a suspicious discoloration is inspected during a *regel* (on Pesach, Shavuot or Sukkot). Rabbi Meir maintains that a *kohen* is permitted to inspect a possible *tzara’at* skin infection only “*le-hakel*” – meaning, for the purpose of proclaiming it pure. This means that if the *kohen* determines that the discoloration indeed qualifies as *tzara’at*, he must remain silent and not formally declare the person a *metzora*, as this would interfere with that person’s Yom Tov celebration. The majority opinion, which the Gemara attributes to Rabbi Yossi, rules that no inspections are made at all on Yom Tov.

The Gemara cites Rava as clarifying the precise circumstances which Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yossi address. Namely, they speak of a situation of “*hesger sheni*,” the second “waiting period” prescribed by the Torah. As we read in Parashat Tazria, a person who is found to have a *tzara’at* infection is [depending on the circumstances] first assigned to a state of “*hesger*,” a weeklong period during which he is quarantined in his home to determine whether the infection will spread. If it does not spread, then a second “*hesger*” period is declared. Rava explains that Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yossi address the case of a person whose second “*hesger*” period concludes during a festival. According to Rabbi Meir, the *kohen* should examine the individual, because if he sees that the infection has begun to heal, then he declares the individual pure, such that he can leave his home and enjoy the Yom Tov. And if the *kohen* sees that the infection had spread, he remains silent, as declaring the person a *metzora* would cause him anguish, which is inappropriate on Yom Tov. Rabbi Yossi, however, disagrees, and maintains that the *kohen* does not inspect the person on Yom Tov in such a case. Rava explains that according to Rabbi Yossi, a *kohen* does not have the option of remaining silent after examining a possible *tzara’at* infection. He must issue a ruling one way or the other. In such a case, therefore, the *kohen* should not inspect the individual because he would be forced to declare him a *metzora* if he sees that the infection had spread.

Rava notes in this context that if a person first notices a suspicious discoloration on Yom Tov, and had not yet been inspected at all by a *kohen*, then according to all opinions, he should not be inspected on Yom Tov. Even Rabbi Meir, who, as we saw, allows the *kohen* to remain silent after an inspection and not issue a ruling, forbids a *kohen* from making an initial inspection on Yom Tov. Rava does not explain the rationale for this ruling of Rabbi Meir. The simplest explanation, it would seem, is that there is no value in inspecting a person at this point. Rabbi Meir allows inspecting a person at the end of “*hesger sheni*” because of the possibility that the *kohen* will determine that he is pure, which will allow him to enjoy the Yom Tov. In the case of an initial inspection, however, there is nothing to be gained by examining the individual on Yom Tov, since in any event he is considered pure, and we do not wish to declare him impure on Yom Tov. Therefore, even Rabbi Meir maintains that the inspection in this case should be delayed until after the holiday.

Tomorrow we will *iy”H* explore a different possible explanation of Rabbi Meir’s opinion.

Monday

Yesterday, we noted the debate between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yossi discussed by the Gemara in Masekhet Mo’ed Katan (7a-b) regarding the protocols relevant to inspecting a suspected *tzara’at* skin infection. As Rava explains, Rabbi Yossi maintained that after a *kohen* inspects the discoloration, he must issue a ruling; he may not remain silent and delay his ruling. Rabbi Meir, by contrast, allows a *kohen* to remain silent after inspecting the suspicious infection. This debate affects the question of whether an inspection may be made on one of the *regalim* (Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot). According to Rabbi Yossi, an inspection should not be made, because if the *kohen* determines that the individual is a *metzora*, he must issue this ruling immediately, and this would disrupt his Yom Tov celebration. Rabbi Meir, however, rules that an inspection may be made, because if the discoloration indeed constitutes *tzara’at*, the *kohen* can simply remain silent, and the individual’s Yom Tov celebration will not be disrupted.

As we saw, Rava explained that Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yossi argue about only one specific circumstance (when the individual’s second “*hesger*” period concludes during a festival). These *Tanna’im* were not addressing the question of making an initial examination on Yom Tov. That is to say, if a person first notices a suspicious discoloration during one of the *regalim*, according to all opinions – even according to Rabbi Meir – no inspection is made.

Rav Moshe Mordechai Karp, in his [*Va-yavinu Ba-mikra*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=46215&st=&pgnum=96), advances a surprising theory to explain why Rabbi Meir agrees to Rabbi Yossi with respect to an initial inspection on the *regalim*. In Parashat Metzora (14:36), in discussing the phenomenon of *tzara’at ha-bayit* (*tzara’at* on the walls of one’s home), the Torah writes that everything must be removed from the home before the *kohen* comes to inspect the discoloration. The reason, as the verse proceeds to explain, is because all the utensils in the home become *tamei* once the *kohen* declares a “*hesger*” waiting period to determine if the discoloration will spread. In order to prevent the loss that one would endure by all his utensils suddenly becoming impure, the Torah required removing the home’s contents before the *kohen*’s inspection. Rashi writes that once the *kohen* sees the discoloration, “*nizkak le-hesger*” – he will be compelled to declare a “*hesger*” period. Significantly, the Torah does not allow the *kohen* the option of simply remaining silent after inspecting the house and delaying his ruling until after the house of emptied of its contents. Instead, the contents must be removed before the *kohen*’s inspection. Rav Karp asserts that this applies both according to Rabbi Yossi and according to Rabbi Meir. Although Rabbi Meir allows a *kohen* to avoid issuing a definitive ruling after inspecting a *tzara’at* infection, nevertheless, the infection is subject to “*hesger*” during the delay. According to Rabbi Meir, if the *kohen* chooses not to issue a ruling, then the individual – or his home, in the case of *tzara’at ha-bayit* – by default enters into a state of “*hesger*.” Therefore, a house with a suspected *tzara’at* infection must be emptied before the *kohen*’s inspection, because even if he remains silent after inspecting the walls, the house will fall into a state of “*hesger*” which results in the impurity of its utensils.

If so, Rav Karp writes, then we can easily understand Rabbi Meir’s position regarding an initial inspection on Yom Tov. Although Rabbi Meir allows a *kohen* the option of remaining silent, this option will result in a default condition of “*hesger*.” Therefore, he allows inspecting a *tzara’at* infection at the end of the second “*hesger*” period, because if the *kohen* sees that the infection had spread, such that the individual must be declared an outright *metzora*, he can simply delay his ruling, and the individual will remain in his state of “*hesger*” until after the holiday. The worst that can happen, then, is that the individual remains in the state in which he had begun the holiday. In the case of an initial inspection, however, if the discoloration indeed constitutes *tzara’at*, the best the *kohen* can do is remain silent, in which case the individual will fall into a default state of “*hesger*.” As we do not wish for this to occur during a festival, Rabbi Meir ruled that an initial inspection should not be made on the festivals.

Tuesday

The Torah instructs that when a person is declared a *metzora*, he must reside outside his city (“*badad yeishev*”)until his *tzara’at* is cured and he undergoes the required process of purification (13:46). The Gemara in Masekhet Arakhin (16) explains this law on the basis of the well-known association between *tzara’at* and the sin of *lashon ha-ra* – negative speech about other people: “He separated between husband and wife, between a man and his fellow; the Torah therefore said, ‘He shall reside in solitude’.” His period of solitude serves as a punishment for his having made people lonely by breaking relationships through his gossip and dissemination of negative information about them.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his [*Oznayim La-Torah*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=39723&st=&pgnum=219), elaborates further on the significance of the *metzora*’s solitude. Indulging in gossip and negativity often expresses an inability or refusal to tolerate other people. A person who consistently complains about others and speaks negatively about them implicitly conveys the message that everyone besides him is bad and undermines his contentment. His mindset, taken to its logical extreme, is that nobody else should inhabit the Earth other than him. When we highlight and protest the negative qualities of all people, we essentially refuse to accept people for the way they are, and insist on a “perfect” world where nobody poses any kind of threat to our happiness. The *metzora* is therefore shown the alternative which he in effect desires: a life of solitude. If everyone is as bad as he makes them out to be; if he cannot tolerate other people’s faults and shortcomings, then his only option is “*badad yeishev*.” The painful experience of solitude, Rav Sorotzkin writes, will serve to make the person aware of how much he craves social interaction, and how much he wishes to be in the company of the people whom he was so fond of criticizing and maligning. The *metzora* is shown that if he wants to enjoy the benefits of social interaction, then he must be willing to accept the challenges of social interaction – the competition for goods and for respect, the unpleasant or even irritating aspects of other people’s characters, and so on. If he is unwilling to accept these challenges, then he is consigned to a life of loneliness and solitude.

Living among people and experiencing the comfort of community requires a positive outlook and mindset, that we focus our attention on all that is good about others and patiently accept the rest. If we cannot tolerate people’s faults and shortcoimngs, then we lose our right to live among them, and are driven “outside the camp,” to suffer the loneliness of seclusion.

Wednesday

The Ramban, in his commentary to Parashat Tazria (13:47), establishes that the *tzara’at* described by the Torah, which affects skin, garments or walls of homes, is a purely spiritual, supernatural phenomenon. It would occur, he explains, only in times when *Benei Yisrael* lived in a general state of spiritual greatness, such that spiritual maladies would manifest themselves in the form of *tzara’at*. In this context, the Ramban notes that the laws of *tzara’at* apply only in the Land of Israel, the place where the *Shekhina* resides, as only there can we reach the state of near spiritual perfection in which *tzara’at* can occur.

A number of writers have noted that the Ramban’s comments appear to be contradicted by an explicit passage in *Torat Kohanim*. Commenting on the final verse of Parashat Tazria (13:59), *Torat Kohanim* writes with regard to *tzara’at ha-beged* (the form of *tzara’at* which affects clothing), “Just as this is a *mitzva* in the land, it is likewise a *mitzva* outside the land.” *Torat Kohanim* here states clearly that the laws of *tzara’at ha-beged* apply equally in *Eretz Yisrael* and elsewhere, seemingly in direct contradistinction to the Ramban’s assertion that the phenomenon of *tzara’at* is relevant specifically in the Land of Israel, where the *Shekhina* is present. (It should be noted that the Ramban makes this comment by way of introduction specifically to the section dealing with *tzara’at ha-beged*.)

Rav Chaim Elazary, in his [*Darkhei Chayim*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=19923&st=&pgnum=218), suggests an answer based on the comments of Chizkuni regarding *tzara’at ha-bayit* – the form of *tzara’at* which surfaces in people’s homes. The Torah writes explicitly that this category of *tzara’at* applies only in *Eretz Yisrael* – “When you enter into the land of Canaan…” (14:34) – and Chizkuni explains this to mean that unlike the other forms of *tzara’at*, *tzara’at ha-bayit* did not occur in the wilderness, before the nation entered the Land of Israel. As the *Shekhina* resided among *Benei Yisrael* in the wilderness, the laws of *tzara’at* applied, with the exception of *tzara’at ha-bayit*, which applied only once *Benei Yisrael* entered the land and built permanent homes. In light of this distinction, Rav Elazary suggests that when *Torat Kohanim* speaks of *tzara’at* applying even “outside the land,” it might mean in the wilderness, during the period when *Benei Yisrael* lived outside the Land of Israel but still had the *Shekhina* in their midst. If so, then the Ramban’s comments can be easily reconciled with those of *Torat Kohanim*. He would likely concede that the laws of *tzara’at* were relevant in the wilderness, despite this being outside *Eretz Yisrael*, since the *Shekhina* resided among *Benei Yisrael* during this period and they were thus in a spiritual state that lent itself to the phenomenon of *tzara’at*.

Rav Mordechai Gifter, in [*Pirkei Torah*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=48052&st=&pgnum=37&hilite=), suggests a different answer, noting that *Torat Kohanim* perhaps refers to the case of a garment which was affected with *tzara’at* and then brought outside the Land of Israel. In such a case, we might have assumed that since the garment is no longer in *Eretz Yisrael*, it is no longer subject to the laws of *tzara’at*. *Torat Kohanim* therefore instructs that since the discoloration appeared when the garment was still in the Land of Israel, it remains subject to the laws of *tzara’at ha-beged* even once it is taken outside the land. This in no way contradicts the position of the Ramban, who presumably refers only to situations where a *tzara’at* infection was seen outside *Eretz Yisrael*.

Thursday

The Torah in Parashat Tazria (13:2) begins its presentation of the laws of *tzara’at* with the words, “*Adam ki yiheyeh be-or besaro*” – speaking of a situation where a person notices a whitening of part of his flesh. The verse continues by instructing that the discoloration should be shown to a *kohen*, who then renders a ruling as to whether it qualifies as a *tzara’at* infection, based on the guidelines set forth by the Torah.

A number of writers found it significant that the Torah here uses specifically the word “*adam*” in reference to a person with a suspected *tzara’at* infection. Several sources indicate that as opposed to other terms commonly used for “person,” the word “*adam*” connotes the human being at his or her highest level and stature. “*Adam*” refers not merely to a human being, but to a great human being, a person of moral and spiritual achievement. The use of the term in the context of *tzara’at* thus caught the attention of several writers, who noted that the word “*adam*” seems, at first glance, inappropriate for a person who is stricken with *tzara’at* on account of his misdeeds.

Rav Nissan Alpert, in *Limudei Nissan* (as cited and discussed by [Rav Dovid Gottlieb](http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/759599/rabbi-dovid-gottlieb/parshas-tazria-tzara-as-as-an-opportunity-for-greatness/)), suggests that the word “*adam*” is used in this context because of what is written in the latter part of the verse: “he shall come to Aharon, the *kohen*, or to one of his sons, the *kohanim*.” The individual is not worthy of the complimentary title “*adam*” because of the causes of his *tzara’at*, but he is worthy of this title because of his response to his *tzara’at*. Rather than ignore the problem, he seeks a remedy by approaching a *kohen* and beginning the process outlined by the Torah. He accepts the consequences of his mistakes and commits himself to rectify them. By approaching a *kohen* and showing him the discoloration, the person accepts the likelihood of being banished from his city because of his status, and recognizes the need for the subsequent purification process whereby he is then able to return. And for this, he is truly deserving of the title “*adam*.”

In Jewish thought, we earn stature not through perfection, or even through near perfection, but rather through honest recognition of our failings and our sincere attempts to overcome them. We achieve the level of “*adam*” not by ensuring to never contract *tzara’at* – spiritual illnesses – but rather by endeavoring to cure ourselves when this does happen. We will all experience periods of “impurity,” of failure and decline, and the Torah instructs that the response must be to proactively work to overcome our failures and to constantly pursue personal change and self-improvement.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Tazria outlines the procedure to be followed when a possible *tzara’at* infection appears on a person’s skin. We read that under certain circumstances, the *kohen* declares a “*hesger*” waiting period to determine whether the discoloration will spread. The Torah establishes that if the *kohen* sees after the “*hesger*” period that the discoloration has begun to fade, then “the *kohen* shall declare him pure…and he [the individual] shall clean his clothing and then become pure” (13:6).

The clear implication of this verse, as noted by Rashi, is that the “*hesger*” waiting period itself casts a status of impurity upon the individual. Although he does not require the lengthy and elaborate purification process required of a person declared as an outright *metzora* (a “*muchlat*”), nevertheless, a person who is consigned to a period of “*hesger*” is regarded as *tamei*, thus necessitating immersion and laundering his garments. Indeed, the Mishna and Gemara in Masekhet Megilla (8b) establish that a person in a state of “*hesger*” is subject to most of the laws that apply to a person declared an outright *metzora*.

The question arises as to the reason underlying this status of impurity assigned to a *musgar* (the term used in reference to a person in a state of “*hesger*”). If the *kohen* determines that the discoloration does not, in fact, qualify as a *tzara’at* infection, then why is the individual considered *tamei*?

Chizkuni (13:6), surprisingly, writes that indeed, the condition of “*hesger*” does not, in and of itself, render a person *tamei*. Rather, given his state of uncertainty, he is not as careful to avoid *tum’a* as people normally would be. Chizkuni writes that a person in a state of possible impurity is not likely to bother to take the necessary precautions to maintain a state of purity, since he might already be *tamei* in any event. For this reason, Chizkuni writes, a person in a state of “*hesger*” is considered *tamei* – not because of the status itself, but rather because of the likelihood that he became *tamei* during this period.

Symbolically, we might suggest a different approach. Perhaps, the *tum’a* associated with the “*hesger*” period signifies the ugliness of even suspected “impurity,” the fact that even something resembling *tum’a* is a cause of revulsion. Even when an accusation is dropped, the fact that it was made and deemed credible enough to warrant a thorough inquiry casts a lingering shadow of suspicion upon the individual. And so once a discoloration is similar enough to a *tzara’at* infection that it requires “*hesger*,” the individual is already considered “impure,” symbolizing the unseemly effects of suspicion and accusation, regardless of the outcome.

This possibility becomes particularly significant in light of the well-known association drawn by *Chazal* between *tzara’at* and *lashon ha-ra* – negative and slanderous speech about other people. Spreading negative information about people causes damage to their reputation that is often irreparable, even if the charges are ultimately disproven. Such information causes a certain “impurity”; it generates an aura of suspicion and distrust surrounding that individual that remains even if the accusations are ignored or dismissed. For this reason, perhaps, the experience of “*hesger*” results in impurity even if the discoloration ultimately does not qualify as *tzara’at* – because even the possibility of *tzara’at*, a suspicion of “impurity,” creates an aura of negativity and suspicion that does not easily dissipate.