**S.A.L.T. – PARASHOT TAZRIA – METZORA**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The opening section of Parashat Metzora outlines the procedure to be undergone by somebody who had been stricken with the *tzara’at* skin infection and was then cured, for him to regain his status of ritual purity. The Torah instructs (14:9) that on the seventh day of the process, the *metzora* (person who had been stricken with *tzara’at*) must remove all the hair on his head and on his entire body.

The *Ben Ish Chai* offers an explanation for the significance of this aspect of the *metzora*’s purification process based on the famous association drawn by *Chazal* between *tzara’at* and the sin of *lashon ha-ra* – negative speech about one’s fellow (Arakhin 16a). The root cause of gossip and talebearing, very often, is jealousy and resentment, the feeling that one’s fellow somehow took that which rightfully belonged to him, or has achieved something which he did not deserve. The *Ben Ish Chai* suggests that hair serves as an appropriate symbol of this mistaken perception, as thousands of strands of hair blend together and appear to occupy one another’s space. In truth, however, each hair grows from a single follicle, and no strand of hair infringes upon the territory of any other. The same is true, the *Ben Ish Chai* writes, of everything we have in life. While it may outwardly appear that we compete and struggle with one another, wrestling from our fellow that which he would otherwise be able to take for himself, in truth, we all receive everything we have from our own unique pipeline of divine blessing. Every individual has his or her own independent “follicle,” in the sense that God provides all people with precisely what they need and deserve, without anybody ever infringing upon the lot of anybody else.

We might apply this symbolic interpretation in a slightly different manner. Communal life resembles hair in the sense that community members live together and are, to one extent or another, “entangled” in each other’s lives. Living as part of a community necessarily requires surrendering some degree of privacy, as by definition, members share a portion of their lives with one another. The gossiper takes this “hair” phenomenon to an extreme, viewing all the individual “strands” as completely “entangled” to the point where nobody’s private affairs need to remain private. For the gossiper, community members surrender their private domain altogether, and each person’s life completely blends with everybody else’s. But when the *metzora*’s hair is removed, he reveals that each hair grows from its own independent source. Although the hair outwardly mixes and blends with all the others, in truth, it stands on its own. The message being conveyed is that even as people live together and join to form a vibrant community, they each retain their individual identity, and are thus entitled to privacy. Even as we work together, we remain separate and apart as private individuals. The gossiper is thus shown that the community experience does not need to, and must never, erase personal boundaries, that even as people join together to form close-knit groups, they must each be given his or her personal space that others may not violate.

Sunday

The Torah in Parashat Tazria presents the guidelines relevant to *tzara’at* skin infections, establishing the basic criteria which determine whether a discoloration on the skin indeed qualifies as *tzara’at* which renders the individual ritually impure. Throughout this section, the Torah indicates that the person becomes *tamei* only through the declaration of a *kohen*. As Rashi (13:2) writes, citing *Torat Kohanim*, the status of *tzara’at* differs from other forms of *tum’a* in that the phenomenon itself does not bring impurity. Even when a person is determined to have a discoloration that qualifies as *tzara’at*, he is not considered *tamei* until proclaimed as such by a *kohen*. Thus, as the Torah instructs, a person who has a suspicious infection must approach a *kohen* who then inspects it to determine its status.

The Mishna in Masekhet Negaim (1:4) brings the view of Rabbi Chanina Segan Ha-kohanim that a *kohen* should not inspect skin discolorations on Sunday. The reason is that in certain situations, as the Torah here (13:4) mentions, a seven-day waiting period is observed to determine if the infection will spread. In such a situation, if the initial inspection had taken place on Sunday, then the seventh day is Shabbat, when no inspections are made, and thus the second inspection will have to be delayed. Rabbi Chanina maintains that such a situation must be avoided, and so initial inspections should not be made on Sunday. For the same reason, Rabbi Chanina rules that inspections should not take place on Monday, either. He explains that if the discoloration did not spread after the seven-day waiting period, then a second seven-day waiting period is observed (13:5). In such a case, the final day of the first waiting period counts towards both periods; meaning, it is considered both the final day of the first period and the first day of the second period. Hence, if the initial inspection takes place on Monday, such that the second inspection is made on Sunday, the third inspection following the second waiting-period will need to be done on Shabbat. Rabbi Chanina therefore rules that initial inspections should not be done on either Sunday or Monday.

Rabbi Akiva disagrees, and maintains that inspections may be done on any weekday, including Sunday and Monday, and the second and third inspections if necessary can be delayed until Sunday. In Rabbi Akiva’s view, we need not delay an initial inspection due to the concern of what may happen a week or two weeks later.

The Rambam (Hilkhot Tum’at Tzara’at 9:7) follows the view of Rabbi Akiva, likely following the general rule that *Halakha* accepts Rabbi Akiva’s position when it is disputed by a single *Tanna*. Rav Ovadya Mi-Bartenura, however, in his commentary to the Mishna, adopts the view of Rabbi Chanina Segan Ha-kohanim, and already the *Tosfot Yom Tov* raises the question of why Rav Ovadya Mi-Bartenura would rule against Rabbi Akiva. (Indeed, Rav Shlomo Adeni suggests in his *Melekhet Shelomo* commentary to the Mishna that the text of Rav Ovadya Mi-Bartenura’s commentary was corrupted, and it should actually read that *Halakha* follows Rabbi Akiva’s position.)

The *Tosfot Yom Tov* suggests that since Rabbi Chanina lived a generation before Rabbi Akiva, his position must be regarded as the majority opinion. Hence, since *Halakha* does not follow Rabbi Akiva in his disputes with the majority of *Tanna’im*, his view in this Mishna is not accepted. In a somewhat similar vein, Rav Malakhi Ha-kohen of Livorno, in his *Yad Malakhi* (*Reish*, 585), suggests that Rabbi Chanina is to be considered Rabbi Akiva’s rabbi, not colleague, since he lived in an earlier generation, and thus *Halakha* accepts his ruling. Rav Malakhi Ha-kohen further proposes that as Rabbi Chanina served in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* in the prestigious role of *segan ha-kohanim* – the “deputy” to the *kohen gadol* – his views on all matters relevant to the sacrifices and other priestly functions are to be accepted as authoritative. Therefore, Rav Ovadya Mi-Bartenura felt that *Halakha* should accept Rabbi Chanina’s ruling as to when the *kohanim* inspect suspicious skin discolorations.

Yet another possibility arises from a theory postulated by the Maharik (Rav Yosef Kolon), in one of his responsa (165:4), limiting the applicability of the rules established by the Gemara for determining the *halakha* in cases of disputes among the Sages. The Maharik asserted that these rules – such as the rule that Rabbi Akiva’s view is accepted over that of another *Tanna* who disagrees – apply only to halakhic matters that are practically relevant even nowadays, in the absence of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. The Gemara did not, according to the Maharik, intend these rules to apply even to disputes regarding questions that will become practically relevant only in the Messianic age. As the laws of *tzara’at* are not currently observed, Rabbi Akiva’s rulings concerning the inspection of possible *tzara’at* infections are not necessarily accepted as authoritative, and for this reason, perhaps, Rav Ovadya of Bartenura did not feel obliged to accept his view presented in this Mishna.

Interestingly enough, as noted by several writers, *Tosfot Yom Tov* himself brings the Maharik’s theory elsewhere in his commentary – in Masekhet Keilim (3:2). It thus seems surprising that *Tosfot Yom Tov* questioned Rav Ovadya Mi-Bartenura’s ruling on the basis of the principle that *Halakha* accepts Rabbi Akiva’s positions, as he was certainly well aware of the possibility that this principle does not apply in the context of *tzara’at*.

(Based on Rav Hillel Lichter’s *Mar’ot Negaim*)

Monday

Yesterday, we noted the dispute among the *Tannaim* that appears in the Mishna in Masekhet Negaim (1:4) as to whether initial *tzara’at* inspections may be made on Sunday and Monday. Rabbi Chanina Segan Ha-kohanim, as we saw, maintained that initial inspections should not be made on these days, as this may result in the day of the second inspection or third inspection falling on Shabbat. As inspections may not be made on Shabbat, the inspection will need to be delayed, and this is a situation that ought to be avoided. Rabbi Akiva disagreed, and allowed making the initial inspection on any weekday.

The clear assumption underlying this discussion is that a *kohen* may not inspect a possible *tzara’at* infection on Shabbat, and the commentators offer different explanations for this *halakha*. Intuitively, we might assume that inspections are not made on Shabbat just as they are not made on Yom Tov, as discussed by the Mishna and Gemara in Masekhet Mo’ed Katan (7-8). Indeed, this appears to be the Rambam’s implication in Hilkhot Tum’at Tzara’at (9:7), where he writes that inspections may be made any day “except Shabbat and Yom Tov.” The *Kesef Mishneh* explains that the Rambam equated Shabbat and Yom Tov in this regard, and understood that on both occasions *tzara’at* inspections should not be made because they could disrupt the joy and festivity of these days.

In his commentary to the Mishna in Masekhet Negaim, however, the Rambam explains this *halakha* differently, claiming that inspecting a skin discoloration resembles a court trial, which may not be held on Shabbat (Beitza 36b). Just as judges may not convene to hear a case on Shabbat, given the concern that they may mistakenly write notes during the trial (Beitza 37a), likewise, a *kohen* may not be summoned to give a ruling about a skin discoloration. This explanation parallels the reason given by some *Rishonim* for the prohibition against bringing a newborn animal to a scholar on Yom Tov to determine whether it has a physical blemish that obviates the need to offer it as a sacrifice. Rashi (Beitza 26a) writes that inspecting a newborn animal resembles a trial, and is thus forbidden on Shabbat and Yom Tov. By the same token, the Rambam maintains that inspecting a suspicious skin discoloration is forbidden on Shabbat as a natural extension of the prohibition against trying cases in court on Shabbat.

However, the *Mishna Acharona* commentary questions this theory, asking why determining the status of a skin discoloration differs from other halakhic queries, which certainly may be answered on Shabbat. Seemingly, the *Mishna Acharona* asserts, the prohibition against trying cases refers only to a situation of two litigants embroiled in a financial dispute, who bring proofs, arguments, and counterproofs and counterarguments, which the judges might write down during the proceedings. Other halakhic questions, however, are allowed to be addressed and answered on Shabbat.

The *Tiferet Yisrael* (*Boaz*, 9) explains the Rambam’s position by drawing a simple distinction between halakhic questions which require intensive examination and analysis, and those which do not. Scholars addressing questions involving complex matters and intricate scrutiny are prone to forgetfully write down their findings over the process of investigation, and so *Chazal* forbade addressing such questions on Shabbat. This is why civil disputes are not brought before courts on Shabbat, and why intricate questions such as the status of a skin discoloration should not be addressed.

Tomorrow we will *iy”H* look at the approach taken by the *Mishna Acharona* to explain this *halakha*.

Tuesday

Today we will continue our discussion of the Mishna in Masekhet Negaim (1:4) which records a debate among the *Tanna’im* regarding the timing of *tzara’at* inspections. According to one view in the Mishna, initial inspections may not be made on days of the week that would result in subsequent inspections being scheduled for Shabbat, as this would necessitate delaying those subsequent inspections. The other opinion argues. As we noted yesterday, the Mishna appears to work off the assumption that inspections may not be done on Shabbat, and the question arises as to why this is the case.

Rav Efrayim Yitzchak of Peremyshl, in his *Mishna Acharona* commentary to Masekhet Negaim, suggests a novel reading of the Mishna, asserting that the issue at stake is “*metakein gavra*” – appearing to “fix” a person on Shabbat. Just as Beit Shammai forbid immersing on Shabbat to divest oneself of his status of impurity (Beitza 17b), as this resembles “fixing” in that one “repairs” his state of impurity, somewhat similarly, it is forbidden for a *kohen* to inspect a *tzara’at* infection on Shabbat to declare it pure, as he “fixes” the person’s state of impurity. On this basis, the *Mishna Acharona* boldly asserts that initial inspections of a skin discoloration are permitted on Shabbat. Indeed, the Mishna does not issue a blanket prohibition against making inspections on Shabbat, but rather discusses whether an initial inspection may take place on a day which will result in a follow-up inspection being required on Shabbat. The *Mishna Acharona* understood that only after an initial inspection has been made, and the individual has been either declared a *metzora* or declared a *musgar*, quarantined to determine if the infection spreads, the subsequent inspection or inspections may not be held on Shabbat. If the *kohen* finds that the discoloration has not spread or has faded, he will then be compelled to declare the individual pure, which would be forbidden on Shabbat due to the consideration of “*metakein gavra*.” Initial inspections, however, where the individual has not yet been assigned any impure status, are entirely permissible on Shabbat, as there is no potential for “*metakein gavra*.”

The *Mishna Acharona* adds that according to his approach, this Mishna must be understood in light of a different Mishna – the Mishna in Masekhet Mo’ed Katan (7a) that discusses the issue of *tzara’at* inspections on festivals. The Mishna cites a debate on this issue, and the Gemara explains that this debate surrounds the question of whether the *kohen* who makes an inspection is permitted to withhold his ruling. According to one view, a *kohen* may inspect a skin discoloration during a festival, but in order not to cause the person distress on the holiday, he should remain silent if he sees that the discoloration is indeed a *tzara’at* infection, thereby delaying the individual’s impurity until after the holiday so he can enjoy the festivities. The other view maintains that a *kohen* is not permitted to remain silent after making an inspection, and so inspections may not be made during festivals, as otherwise the *kohen* might be compelled to declare a person impure during the holiday. The *Mishna Acharona* notes that our Mishna in Negaim, necessarily, follows this second view. According to the first opinion, there is no reason to even consider forbidding initial inspections on days that will result in a subsequent inspection being scheduled for Shabbat. Since the problem with inspections on Shabbat lies solely in the prohibition of “*metakein gavra*,” this problem can easily be avoided by the *kohen* remaining silent if he sees that the inspection has been cured and the individual can be declared pure. The fact that the Mishna did not consider this possibility reflects its assumption that a *kohen* is not permitted to remain silent after making an inspection. According to the other opinion, there is no reason whatsoever to avoid a situation of a follow-up inspection required on Shabbat, as there is the simple solution of remaining silent if the *kohen* determines that the infection has been cured.

Wednesday

Earlier this week, we noted the Rambam’s ruling in Hilkhot Tum’at Tzara’at (9:7) that a *kohen* may inspect a skin discoloration to determine whether it qualifies as *tzara’at* on any day of the week “except Shabbat and Yom Tov.” The *Kesef Mishneh* commentary, as we saw, understood from the Rambam’s formulation that inspections should not be made on Shabbat for the same reason as they may not be made on Yom Tov. On festivals, as the Gemara discusses in Maskhet Mo’ed Katan (7-8), inspections are not made because declaring a person impure would disrupt his festivity and celebration. According to the *Kesef Mishneh*, the Rambam applied this reasoning to Shabbat, as well, and maintained that inspections must not be made on Shabbat due to the obligation to rejoice on Shabbat. (Although, as we saw, the Rambam gives a different reason for this *halakha* in his commentary to the Mishna, Negaim 1:4.)

Rav Efrayim Yitzchak of Peremyshl, in his *Mishna Acharona* commentary to Masekhet Negaim (1:4), dismisses this theory, arguing that there is no obligation of *simcha* (rejoicing) on Shabbat as there is on Yom Tov. It is only on Yom Tov that the anguish potentially caused by a *tzara’at* inspection forces us to forbid such inspections, due to the obligation of *simcha*. On Shabbat, however, no such obligation exists, and thus there must be some other reason why inspections are forbidden on Shabbat (as we’ve discussed in our last several installments).

The *Mishna Acharona*’s comments touch upon the issue addressed by many writers concerning the formal classification of the *mitzva* of enjoyment on Shabbat. The view expressed by the *Mishna Acharona*, distinguishing between the experiences of Shabbat and Yom Tov in this regard, was developed at length by Rav Soloveitchik in one of his published lectures (*Shiurim Le-zekher Abba Mari z”l*, vol. 1, pp. 64-68). Rav Soloveitchik asserted that the obligation of *simcha* of Yom Tov stems from the experience of appearing before God in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, which is unique to the three pilgrimage festivals (Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot), and thus has no place on Shabbat. This assertion is sourced in *Tosefot*’s comments in Masekhet Mo’ed Katan (23b) explaining that Shabbat, unlike Yom Tov, does not terminate the *shiva* mourning period because there is no obligation to rejoice on Shabbat as there is on Yom Tov. The *simcha* we are to experience on Yom Tov diametrically conflicts with mourning, and so the onset of Yom Tov brings an end to the observance of mourning. Shabbat, by contrast, does not conflict with mourning, and for this reason mourning is observed even on Shabbat (albeit in far more moderate fashion, as only private mourning practices are observed).

According to this approach, we must distinguish between the obligation of *oneg Shabbat*, which requires enjoying oneself on Shabbat, such as through fine foods, and the obligation of *simchat Yom Tov*, which requires a more general experience of joy.

Many writers have noted that a passage in the *Sifrei* appears to indicate otherwise. The Torah in Sefer Bamidbar (10:10) requires sounding the *chatzotzerot* (trumpets) on “*yom simchatkhem*” (“your day of joy”) and on “*mo’adeikhem*” (“your festivals”), and the *Sifrei* explains the former term as referring to Shabbat. If the Torah calls Shabbat our “day of joy,” then we may reasonably conclude that there is an obligation of *simcha* on Shabbat. However, the Vilna Gaon emends the text of the *Sifrei* such that it interprets only the word “*be-yom*” (“on the day”) as referring to Shabbat, not the entire phrase “*u-v’yom simchatkhem*.” According to this version of the text, the *Sifrei* does not associate Shabbat with the experience of *simcha*. Moreover, Rav Soloveitchik (cited by [Rav Binyamin Tabory](http://etzion.org.il/he/%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%97%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%A9%D7%91%D7%AA)) understood the *Sifrei* as referring to the joy required in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on Shabbat when offering the special *musaf* sacrifice. The *musaf* offering was accompanied by joyous singing and festivity, and it is only in this sense, according to Rav Soloveitchik, that Shabbat is described as a “day of joy.” It is therefore described this way specifically in the context of the obligation to sound the *chatzotzerot* in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* at the time the sacrifices were offered.

Incidentally, Rav Soloveitchik (in the aforementioned lecture) explained on this basis the practice of many Ashkenazim (those who follow the traditional *nusach Ashkenaz* prayer text) to make mention of the theme of *simcha* in the *musaf* prayer on Shabbat – “*Yismechu be-malkhutkha*…” – but not in the other Shabbat prayer services. Citing his father, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, he proposed that the experience of *simcha* on Shabbat is associated specifically with the *musaf* sacrifice, which was accompanied by great joy and festivity in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, and thus we include the theme of *simcha* in our *musaf* prayer which commemorates the *musaf* sacrifice. The *nusach Sefarad* prayer text, which is based upon the teachings of the Arizal, includes the passage “*Yismechu be-malkhutcha*” in all four of the Shabbat prayers, perhaps reflecting the view that *simcha* is required on Shabbat just as it is on Yom Tov.

Thursday

The Torah introduces the concept of *tzara’at ha-adam* – the form of *tzara’at* that affects people’s skin – by mentioning that it is manifest in three forms of discoloration: *se’eit*, *sapachat* and *baheret* (13:2). *Chazal* (Negaim 1:1, Shavuot 5b-6b) understood the Torah as actually referring to four different shades of the color white. The word *sapachat* is interpreted to mean “secondary,” such that the Torah here speaks of two primary colors – *se’eit* and *baheret* – each of which also has a secondary color which likewise constitutes a *tzara’at* infection. The four colors are snow-white, *sid ha-heikhal* (the color of the white plaster used for the walls of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*), the color of egg whites, and the color of wool of a newborn lamb. The *Tanna’im* disagree as to which of these four colors are the primary white colors and which are secondary, but all agree that a skin discoloration qualifies as *tzara’at* only if it is one of these forms of white.

Many have noted the irony in the fact that *tzara’at*, which brings the strictest of all forms of *tum’a* (impurity), manifests itself specifically through the color white, which is a common symbol of purity. God proclaims through the prophet Yeshayahu (1:18), “If your sins are like crimson, they will be white like snow; if they are as red as dye, they will be like wool.” And the Mishna in Masekhet Yoma (68b) tells that a red thread (“*lashon shel zehorit*”) was hung in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on Yom Kippur and would miraculously turn white to indicate to the people that they achieved forgiveness. If the whiteness of snow and wool are symbols of atonement and purity, why is it that the impurity of *tzara’at* is caused specifically by skin turning this color?

Some have explained this irony based on the famous association between *tzara’at* and interpersonal offenses, specifically *lashon ha-ra* (negative speech about other people), which is often the outgrowth of arrogance and snobbery. The symbolic message of *tzara’at* is precisely that “purity” – genuine spiritual devotion – can sometimes lead to the impurity of arrogance and disdain for other people. The white discoloration indicates that the individual’s purity has resulted in impurity, that his quest for piety brought him to impious condescension and contempt for other people. *Lashon ha-ra* is a sin to which “pure” individuals are especially prone, as their enthusiastic pursuit of spiritual excellence can so easily cause them to look disdainfully upon, and speak disdainfully about, people who do not pursue piety with the same vigor and passion that they possess. *Tzara’at*, then, warns of the dangerous pitfalls of purity, reminding us that our efforts to grow and achieve must never lead us to arrogant and self-righteous disdain for other people.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Metzora discusses the procedure to be followed in the case of *tzara’at ha-bayit* – when a person notices a discoloration on the walls of his home. The individual must summon a *kohen* to inspect the discoloration, and if the *kohen* determines that the spot qualifies as *tzara’at*, he declares the house *tamei* (“impure”). The Torah proceeds to outline the steps taken after this declaration, which, depending on the circumstances, could result in the requirement to dismantle the entire house.

Before the *kohen* declares the house impure, the Torah instructs that the house must be emptied of its contents, “so that everything in the home would not become impure” (14:36). Rashi, following the view of Rabbi Meir cited by the Mishna (Negaim 12:5), explains that the Torah sought to spare the homeowner further financial loss by requiring the removal of all earthenware utensils before the *kohen* declares the home impure. Such utensils are susceptible to *tum’a* and have no possibility of being purified, and thus if they remain in the home when the *kohen* declares the home impure, they will become permanently impure. Their value would thus drop, as they could no longer be used with hallowed food, and for this reason, the Torah requires the *kohen* to delay his proclamation until these utensils are removed from the home. (The Rambam, in Hilkhot Tum’at Tzara’at 14:4, follows the view of Rabbi Yehuda, that the Torah requires emptying the house of all its contents, including items which do not contract *tum’a*.)

Symbolically, this *halakha* might convey an important lesson regarding the “proclamations” of “impurity” that we are sometimes forced to make about the people around us. Just as the *kohen* delays his proclamation in order to protect the contents of the home from becoming impure, so must we avoid proclaiming “impurity” upon the totality of other people’s characters. All people have “impurities” of one kind or another, and so invariably, in our social interactions, we will encounter character traits in others that we dislike. Too often, however, we label someone thoroughly “impure” simply because of one or two unappealing qualities or tendencies. The procedure of *tzara’at ha-bayit* perhaps symbolically instructs to hesitate before declaring “impurity,” to ensure that we distinguish between people’s faults and their admirable qualities, rather than write them off as completely “impure” on account of their faults.

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