**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT METZORA**

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This shiur is dedicated to the refua sheleima of our alumnus

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Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Metzora discusses the laws of *tzara’at ha-bayit*, which apply when a discoloration appears on the walls of a home in *Eretz Yisrael*. If the discoloration meets the Torah’s criteria of *tzara’at ha-bayit*, we read, then the *kohen* declares a seven-day waiting period, after which he returns to determine whether or not the discoloration has spread. If it has, then he instructs the homeowner to remove the affected stones, replace them with new stones, and then line them with plaster (14:40-42).

The Mishna in Masekhet Negaim (12:6) establishes that the responsibility for removing the affected stones and replacing them falls upon both the homeowner and his neighbor with whom he shares the wall in question; this is a burden they must jointly share. *Chazal* reached this conclusion on the basis of the plural form used by the Torah in reference to these tasks (“***Ve-chiletzu*** *et ha-avanim…****ve-hishlikhu****…****ve-lakechu*** *avanim acheirot*”). The plural form implies that this responsibility is borne by the homeowner as well as somebody else, and thus *Chazal* concluded that it is shared with the neighbor. The Mishna adds that on this basis it was said, “*Oy la-rasha oy li-shkheino*” – that a wicked person’s neighbor often suffers the consequences of the evildoer’s wicked deeds. The fact that the neighbor is penalized for the misfortune which befell the homeowner, whose house was stricken with *tzara’at* on account of his misdeeds, shows how those in a sinner’s vicinity often suffer the consequences of his wrongdoing.

The likely explanation of the Mishna’s comment is that a person’s social circle often bears a degree of responsibility for his failings. The process of *tzara’at ha-bayit* should perhaps be viewed as symbolic of a process of moral or spiritual rehabilitation, and thus the neighbor’s obligations may be understood as reflecting his responsibility to participate in this process. If the afflicted home is to be rehabilitated and rid of the ills that plague it, then the family’s social circle must play its role and take part in making the necessary changes to eliminate the “*tzara’at*” that currently afflicts the family.

Importantly, however, there is one part of the process for which the homeowner bears exclusive responsibility. The Mishna adds that only the homeowner, and not the neighbor, is responsible for bringing new earth and plastering the new stones. The Torah speaks of this stage of the process in the singular verb form – “*ve-afar acher* ***yikach ve-tach*** *et ha-bayit*” – indicating that this responsibility falls solely on the shoulders of the homeowner. The message, perhaps, is that the homeowner cannot cast all the blame or responsibility for his condition on his neighbors and his surroundings. While it is true that they likely played a role in his failings and must therefore participate in the process of recovery, ultimately, he must take personal responsibility for his condition. The wall between him and his neighbor must be rebuilt by them both, but the interior plastering is his sole responsibility. He must do what he can within his own home, in his own speech and conduct, to grow, change and improve.

This *halakha* reminds us that while our surroundings indeed have a significant impact upon us, nevertheless, we ultimately control what we say and do. We cannot blame all our shortcomings and failings on the people around us. As much as we want and hope for the people around us to help us in creating an appropriate environment, this does not absolve us from “plastering” our own “walls,” from doing all we can to improve ourselves irrespective of what’s happening outside.

Sunday

The opening section of Parashat Metzora outlines the procedure whereby a *metzora* regains his state of purity. This ritual includes two birds, one of which is slaughtered, after which the remaining bird is dipped in its blood and later sent away.

The Gemara in Masekhet Kiddushin (57b) establishes that although the bird which is slaughtered as part of this ritual is forbidden for any sort of personal benefit, the other bird is entirely permitted. The proof, the Gemara explains, lies in the fact that the second bird is sent away back into freedom, such that anybody can then hunt it and eat it. The Gemara comments, “*Lo amera Torah shalach le-takala*” – it is inconceivable that the Torah would issue a command that might likely result in an unwitting violation. If the live bird were forbidden, the Torah would not have instructed that it be let free and thus potential cause a person to sin by catching it and partaking of its meat.

Numerous *Acharonim* raised the question of how to explain the Gemara’s rationale in light of the well-established rule of *bittul be-rov* (“nullification” by a majority). Even if the bird used for the *metzora*’s purification was forbidden, it would be entirely permissible to catch and slaughter birds, as the overwhelming majority of birds have not been used for the *metzora*’s purification. In light of the clear, undisputed principle of *rov*, which allows relying on a statistical majority, there would, seemingly, be no “*takala*” (“offense”) resulting from sending free a bird that is forbidden for consumption. As such, the Gemara’s line of reasoning seems, at first glance, flawed.

Rav Shimon Shkop, in his [*Sha’arei Yosher* (*Sha’arei Ha-sefeikot*, chapter 2)](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=20983&st=&pgnum=18), cites the Gemara’s comment amidst his discussion of the nature of the *halakha* which permits, under certain circumstances, committing an act which might possibly constitute a violation. Rav Shimon asserts that even in such circumstances, if it turns out that the violation was committed, then the invidual is considered to have committed a sin and requires atonement. Although *Halakha* permitted him to take this risk, he nevertheless must seek atonement if he discovers that he had, indeed, violated the law in question. Thus, for example, if a person had a piece of meat which may have been *cheilev* (forbidden animal fat), but because of the statistical probability that it was permissible he was halakhically entitled to eat it, if he later determines that it was *cheilev* he must bring a sin-offering. Even though it was entirely permissible to eat the piece in question, once he discovers that he ate something forbidden, he requires atonement. By the same token, Rav Shimon writes, if somebody knows that a given piece of meat is forbidden, he may not present it to somebody to eat, even though *Halakha* would permit that other person to eat the meat given the statistical probability that it is kosher. When *Halakha* permits acting leniently in a situation of *safeik* (halakhic doubt), it does not suspend the prohibition in question, but rather authorizes the individual to risk violating a prohibition. But if it is determined that the prohibition has been violated, atonement is needed, and thus it is forbidden to place somebody in such a situation, given the prohibition against causing one’s fellow to sin (“*Lifnei iver lo titein mikhshol*”).

Rav Shimon draws proof from the Gemara’s comment regarding the bird of the *metzora*’s purification ritual. Although one would be permitted to hunt and eat birds even if the Torah had forbade this bird, in light of the statistical probability that any given bird is permissible, nevertheless, one who would eat the forbidden bird would be considered to have inadvertently transgressed Torah law. The Gemara understandably found it inconceivable that the Torah would create a situation where a person would unwittingly committed a violation.

Rav Shimon notes that the exception to this rule is the case of *orla* outside *Eretz Yisrael*. Although the prohibition of *orla* (fruit produced by a tree within three years of being planted) applies even outside the Land of Israel, it is forbidden there only when one knows for certainty that a given fruit is *orla*. Whereas in Israel one must ensure before eating a fruit that it is not *orla*, outside the land one may eat any fruit as long as he does not know that it is *orla*. Rav Shimon establishes that *safeik orla* – fruit whose status vis-à-vis *orla* is uncertain – is permitted outside *Eretz Yisrael* intrinsically, and not merely as a matter of policy. That is to say that when one eats *safeik orla* outside the land, he is not running any risk of violating the *orla* prohibition. The prohibition outside *Eretz Yisrael* is inherently dependent upon the certainty of the fruit’s status. Therefore, if a person ate a fruit in *chutz la-aretz* and afterward discovered it was *orla*, no atonement is necessary. Moreover, it is entirely permissible to knowingly feed a person *orla* in *chutz la-aretz* without informing him of the fruit’s status. Since knowledge of the fruit’s status is a prerequisite for the application of the *orla* prohibition outside *Eretz Yisrael*, the individual in such a case does not violate any law by eating the *orla*, even inadvertently.

Monday

The Torah in Parashat Metzora presents the laws relevant to a *bayit ha-menuga* – a house afflicted with *tzara’at* on its walls. We read that the homeowner – “*asher lo ha-bayit*” – is to approach the *kohen* upon noticing a discoloration to report it, and the *kohen* then comes to determines whether the discoloration indeed qualifies as *tzara’at* (14:35).

The Gemara in Masekhet Yoma (11b) detects within the phrase “*asher lo ha-bayit*” an allusion to the homeowner’s miserliness and selfishness. The house and all its contents are “*lo*” – exclusively his, and he refuses to share them with others. The Gemara comments that this form of *tzara’at* would come upon a person who would falsely deny having in his possession items which his neighbors ask to borrow. Therefore, the Torah instructs that the house must be emptied of its contents before the *kohen* declares the house impure, in order to show everyone that the individual indeed owns those items which he denied possessing.

Although the Gemara speaks of the emptying of the house as serving to publicize the homeowner’s blessings by putting them on display for others to see, this may also be intended as an opportunity to remind him of how much he truly owns. One of the impediments that sometimes prevent us from assisting others is our preoccupation with our own problems and needs. We claim – to ourselves – that we do not own enough to assist others. Concerned and anxious about our own shortage of resources, and overburdened by the self-imposed pressure that we experience, we fail to lend the assistance that we are capable of providing. But when we “empty” our homes, when we take stock of what we have, we often realize that we have considerably more than we had thought. Just as the emptying of the afflicted home showed the neighborhood and the homeowner himself that he possessed more than he had claimed, similarly, we often underestimate our blessings and fail to recognize just how much we own. Once we realize how much we have, we will be more open to sharing our blessings with others.

The context of the Gemara’s comment, of course, is material possessions, but the message applies equally to other resources, such as talents and skills. We sometimes feel we have nothing to offer those around of us, that our limited skill set forces us to retreat into our own “homes,” our own private lives. We fail to recognize our talents that can and should be used to positively impact the people around us, and this causes us to tend exclusively to our own needs rather than extend beyond ourselves. The Gemara here perhaps urges us to recognize just how much we have, to honestly assess our skills and talents, limited as they may be, and acknowledge that we are capable of achieving and contributing more than currently do.

Tuesday

The process of a *metzora*’s purification, as the Torah outlines in Parashat Metzora (14:1-32), includes the offering of three sacrifices – an *asham* (guilt-offering), a *chatat* (sin-offering), and an *ola* (burnt-offering). An ordinary *metzora*, the Torah instructs, brings three sheep – two male, for the *asham* and *ola*, and a female for the *chatat*. If, however, the *metzora* is poor, and cannot afford three sheep, then he offers one sheep as an *asham* and two birds (which are less expensive than sheep) for the *chatat* and *ola*.

The Mishna in Masekhet Negaim (14:12) establishes that if a poor *metzora*, who is permitted to bring the less expensive sacrifice, nevertheless chooses to bring the standard sacrifice, then he fulfills his obligation. The Rash Mi-Shantz, in his commentary to the Mishna, adds that this *halakha* applies not only *be-di’avad* – after the fact, if a mistake was made – but even *le-khatechila* (from the outset). Meaning, a poor *metzora* is fully entitled to choose to offer the more expensive sacrifice. In fact, the Rash Mi-Shantz adds, this would be a praiseworthy measure (“*tavo alav berakha*”).

The *Mishneh Le-melekh* (Hilkhot Shegagot 10:13) observes that the Mishna’s ruling would seem to disprove the controversial position taken by the *Sefer Ha-chinukh* (123) regarding the similar case of a *korban oleh ve-yoreid*. Earlier in Sefer Vayikra (5:1-13), the Torah requires the violator of certain transgression to offer a sheep as a *chatat*, but if the individual cannot afford a sheep, he may bring instead two birds – one as a *chatat*, and the other as an *ola*. In that case, the *Chinukh* maintains, a poor man does not fulfill his obligation if he decides to offer the more expensive sacrifice despite his difficult financial condition. The *Mishneh Le-melekh* raises the question of why the *Chinukh* disqualifies a standard *korban oleh ve-yoreid* offered by a poor person, in light of the fact that the Mishna explicitly allows – and perhaps even encourages – a poor *metzora* to offer a standard sacrifice.

A number of writers (*Sefat Emet*, Yoma 41b; Rav Yerucham Perlow, in his commentary to Rav Saadia Gaon’s listing of the *mitzvot*, *asei* 144) suggested a fairly simple reason to distinguish between the two cases. In the case of a *metzora*, he brings the same three kinds of sacrifices – a *chatat*, *ola* and *asham* – regardless of his financial status. The only difference between a regular *metzora* and an impoverished *metzora* is that the latter brings birds instead of sheep for the *chatat* and *ola*. In the case of a *korban oleh ve-yored*, by contrast, the standard offering consists of just a *chatat*, whereas the poor person’s sacrifice includes both a *chatat* and *ola*. The impoverished individual’s sacrifice is less expensive – consisting of two small birds, the combined cost of which is less than that of one sheep – but it includes two sacrifices, and not just one. Hence, since the Torah requires him to offer both a *chatat* and an *ola*, he cannot offer the more expensive sacrifice, which consists of only a *chatat*.

A different answer is offered by Rav Yaakov Ettlinger, in his [*Arukh La-ner* commentary to Masekhet Keritut (28a)](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=14411&st=&pgnum=95). The Gemara there cites a textual source for the *halakha* permitting an impoverished *metzora* to bring a standard sacrifice, clearly implying that intuitively, we would have assumed that he fulfills his obligation only with the sacrifice assigned by the Torah for the poor. It is only because of a nuance in the text that *Chazal* concluded that a poor *metzora* is given the right to offer the more expensive sacrifice. Naturally, then, in the case of a *korban oleh ve-yored*, where no such textual inference is made, a poor man cannot fulfill his obligation with a wealthy man’s sacrifice.

(See Rav Yechiel Tzik’s [*Yekara De-orayta*, Parashat Metzora](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=52717&st=&pgnum=495))

Wednesday

Yesterday, we noted the question addressed by several *Acharonim* concerning two different situations where the Torah requires different kinds of sacrifices for people of different financial statuses. One case is that of a *metzora* undergoing his process of purification, who brings three sheep, unless he is destitute, in which case he brings two birds. The Mishna (Negaim 14:12) states that an impoverished *metzora* is allowed to offer the more expensive sacrifice is he so chooses. This *halakha* stands in contrast to the position of the *Sefer Ha-chinukh* (123) concerning the *korban oleh ve-yored* – an atonement sacrifice required by the Torah in cases of certain kinds of violations (Vayikra 5:1-13). There, too, the Torah designates different sacrifices for people of different financial statuses, but in this instance, the *Chinukh* maintains that a poor man does not fulfill his obligation by bringing the more expensive offering.

A clever explanation of the *Chinukh*’s position is offered by Rav Meir Dan Platzky, in his *Keli Chemda* (Parashat Vayikra). Among the distinctions between the sacrifices of the *metzora* and the *korban oleh ve-yored*, Rav Platzky observes, is that in the case of the *korban oleh ve-yored*, the Torah establishes three different levels, and not just two. Specifically, a person of means brings a sheep; a poor person brings two birds; and an indigent person, who cannot even afford two birds, brings some flour as his offering. This is in contrast to the *metzora*’s offering, regarding which the Torah delineates only two levels – a standard offering (three sheep) and a less expensive offering for the poor (one sheep and two birds). Rav Platzky contends that in the case of a severely destitute sinner who must offer an *oleh ve-yored*, and whom the Torah requires to bring the least expensive sacrifice (flour), it would be forbidden for him to choose the higher level, and to offer two birds. The reason relates to the unique method of killing a bird offered as a sacrifice. Whereas generally birds may be eaten only after undergoing proper *shechita*, just like animals, a bird offered as a sacrifice is killed through *melika* (severing the back of the neck with a fingernail – Vayikra 1:15, 5:8). An ordinary bird killed through *melika* would be considered a “*neveila*” and thus forbidden for consumption, yet in the case of a bird offered as *chatat*, the Torah requires the *kohanim* to partake of the bird’s meat, despite its not having undergone *shechita*. Rav Platzky thus writes that in the case of an *oleh ve-yored*, only one whom the Torah specifically requires to offer two birds – one as an *ola* and the other as a *chatat* – may bring such an offering, as only in such a case does the Torah permit the *kohanim* to eat the meat of the bird that was killed through *melika*. A direly poor sinner, whom the Torah commands to bring a flour offering, may not choose the option of bringing two birds, because in such a case, the Torah did not authorize the *kohanim* to eat a bird that had not undergone *shechita*. The *Chinukh* therefore reasoned that once a direly impoverished sinner may not offer a more expensive sacrifice than the one stipulated by the Torah, a moderately poor sinner, who is required to bring two birds, is likewise not permitted to bring the more expensive sacrifice. This clearly is not relevant in the case of *metzora*, regarding which the Torah assigns only two levels, and thus a poor *metzora* is allowed to bring the more expensive offering.

Thursday

Toward the end of Parashat Metzora, the Torah discusses the status of ritual impurity that takes effect when a person experiences bodily discharges. In the case of a *zav* or *zava* – a man or woman who experiences an unusual discharge, as opposed to normal semenal emissions or menstruation – the purification process entails the offering of two birds as sacrifices (15:14-15, 29-30).

The case of a *zav* or *zava* is exceptional in that the individual brings two birds as a sacrifice regardless of his or her financial status. In other instances when the Torah requires offering two birds, this is because the individual is poor and cannot afford the standard, more expensive, offering. One example appears earlier in Parashat Metzora, where the Torah describes the special sacrifices offered by a *metzora* as part of his purification. The standard requirement includes three sheep, but a poor *metzora* brings instead a sheep and two birds. In the case of a *zav* or *zava*, by contrast, even if the individual is wealthy, he or she offers two birds, and does not have to offer a larger sacrifice.

The *Meshekh Chokhma* suggests an explanation for this difference between the case of a *metzora* and that of a *zav* or *zava*. He notes that whereas a *metzora* is required to publicize his state of impurity (Rashi to 13:45), the status of a *zav* or *zava*, understandably, would usually remain private. As such, the *Meshekh Chokhma* writes, the Torah wanted the *metzora*’s purification to be publicized – just as his state of impurity had been publicized – but the *zav* or *zava*’s purification to be done as discreetly as possible. For this reason, every *zav* and *zava* brings birds, and not animals. As the *Meshekh Chokhma* observes, the offering of a bird sacrifice requires just a single *kohen*, whereas the offering of an animal sacrifice involves numerous *kohanim*. When an animal is sacrificed, its blood is collected during the slaughtering, and it must then be brought to the altar and sprinkled. The animal is thereupon skinned, its fats are placed on the altar, and all its meat must be partaken by the *kohanim* by the following morning. This is a far more public procedure than the offering of a bird sacrifice, which requires just a single *kohen* who kills the animal, extracts the blood against the altar, and then removes certain parts of the bird. Additionally, the bird has only a small quantity of meat, and thus only a very small number of *kohanim* participate in its consumption. Accordingly, the *Meshekh Chokhma* suggests that the Torah required a *zav* and *zava* to offer birds in order to help maintain their privacy. This is in contrast to the *metzora*, whose purification should be made public, and whose sacrifice therefore entails elaborate animal sacrifices which involve numerous *kohanim*.

In light of the *Meshekh Chokhma*’s analysis, we might perhaps suggest an additional explanation for why the Torah permits a poor *metzora* to offer the standard sacrifice if he so wishes (as we’ve discussed in our last two editions of S.A.L.T.; see Mishna, Negaim 14:12). According to the *Meshekh Chokhma*, it appears, a *metzora* in a state of poverty is given the option to choose between a cheaper, more private offering, and a more expensive but more public offering. Essentially, he is allowed to decide whether he prefers the public nature of animal sacrifices to make his purification known, despite the added cost, or to forego on the additional publicity in the interest of reducing the financial burden of his purification. He is allowed to choose between these two options because each offers an advantage over the other, and the Torah grants him the right to choose which he prefers.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Metzora outlines the procedure for the purification of a *metzora*, which concludes with the offering of a series of sacrifices in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. The blood of one of the sacrifices, we read, is placed on the *metzora*’s right earlobe, thumb and bigtoe (14:14), after which oil is placed on those same spots (14:17) and then on the *metzora*’s head (14:18).

The Mishnayot in Masekhet Negaim (14) explain that this is done while the *metzora* stood just outside the Temple courtyard (by “*Sha’ar Nikenor*”). Since the *metzora* is not permitted inside the Temple until the completion of his purification process, which includes the offering of these sacrifices, he may not enter the *Beit Ha-mikdash* at this point. Instead, he stands outside the gate and thrusts his head, hand and foot through the gate for the purpose of these rituals.

The Gemara, in Masekhet Zevachim (32b) addresses the case of a *metzora* whose day for bringing his sacrifices fell on Erev Pesach, and he experienced a semenal emission the previous night. A *ba’al keri* (somebody who experienced a semenal emission) may not enter or even place his hand into the Temple courtyard until the following night (after he immerses). Normally, then, if a *metzora* experienced a semenal emission the night before he was scheduled to offer his sacrifices, he would be forced to delay the sacrifices another day, as his status of *ba’al keri* makes it forbidden for him to place his head, hand and foot into the Temple courtyard. However, if this occurred on Erev Pesach, a special dispensation is made in order to allow him to partake of the *korban pesach*. Although a *ba’al keri* (even after immersion) is generally forbidden from placing even one hand into the Temple courtyard until the next night, the *metzora* in this case is permitted to place his head, hand and foot through the gate so he can complete his purification and then participate in the *korban pesach* that night.

The Tolna Rebbe noted the irony in the fact that a special dispensation is made specifically for a *metzora*. *Tzara’at* marks the most severe form of ritual impurity, which imposes the greatest number of restrictions and requires the longest and most involved process of purification. The *metzora*, unlike all other *temei’im* (impure people), is banished from walled cities, and must conduct himself like a mourner in several respects. In order to regain his status of purity, he must undergo a special ritual and then offer a series of sacrifices eight days later. This is the strictest level of *tum’a*, and yet the Torah gives him a special privilege to allow him to participate in the *korban pesach*, one which is not granted to others.

The lesson that perhaps emerges from this *halakha*, at least on a symbolic level, is that no matter how low a person sinks, once he begins the process of return, he must be warmly embraced and given every opportunity to complete the process. Just as the Torah “assists” the *metzora* to complete his purification in time for the *korban pesach*, we, too, must show understanding and sensitivity, and offer assistance, to all those who genuinely seek to improve and return to a proper Torah lifestyle, no matter how dark the stains are on their record. If somebody is sincere in his desire and attempts to repent and improve, we must accept him and grant him the support he needs, irrespective of his troubled past.

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