**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT METZORA**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The process of a *metzora*’s purification, which the Torah outlines in the opening section of Parashat Metzora, concludes with the offering of special sacrifices in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. The Torah requires the *metzora* to bring all the materials needed for these sacrifices and to stand “before the Lord, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting” (14:11) – meaning, in the courtyard of the *Mishkan*, or, later, of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.

The Gemara in Masekhet Pesachim (85b) notes the inherent problem with this requirement – that the *metzora* appear in the *azara*, the courtyard of the Temple. The *metzora* is considered *tamei* (ritually impure) until after the sacrifices are offered, and thus he is forbidden from entering the Temple courtyard until that point. How, then, can the Torah demand that the *metzora* bring the animals and materials into the *azara*, when he is still *tamei*?

The Gemara answers that one of the gates leading to the *azara* – *sha’ar Nikenor* – was erected with the intention that the width of the gate should not be included as part of the halakhic *azara*. The area underneath the other gates leading to the *azara* were all endowed with the status of sanctity conferred upon the *azara* itself, but the area of *sha’ar Nikenor* was excluded from this status, specifically to enable the *metzora* to fulfill his obligations. The Gemara teaches that the *metzora* would stand in the area of the gate, and, when the time came for the *kohen* to place sacrificial blood on the *metzora*’s finger, toe and earlobe – as the Torah requires as part of the purification ceremony (14:14) – the *metzora* would bring those parts of the body into the courtyard for this purpose.

Tosafot, in Masekhet Yevamot (7b), raise the question of why it was necessary to exclude *sha’ar Nikenor* from the sanctity of the *azara* for this purpose. After all, if the area of the gate was endowed with sanctity, the *metzora* could simply stand just outside the gate and then bring his finger, toe and earlobe into the area of the gate for the blood to be placed. What was gained by excluding the area of this gate from the sanctity of the *azara* so that the *metzora* could stand there?

Tosafot cite the Rivan (Rabbenu Yehuda ben Natan, a disciple and son-in-law of Rashi) as finding the answer in the term “*lifnei Hashem*” (“before the Lord”) in the verse cited above. The Torah requires that the *metzora* appear not merely in the *azara*, but “*lifnei Hashem*.” The Rivan suggested that although the area of the gates was endowed with the status of the *azara*, a person standing in those areas was not considered to be standing “before the Lord.” To stand “before the Lord,” the Rivan maintained, one needed to be inside the courtyard, and not in the gateway – even though the gateway also had the halakhic status of sanctity conferred upon the *azara* itself. Therefore, in order for the *metzora* to fulfill his requirement to stand “before the Lord,” one of the gates needed to be excluded from the halakhic area of the courtyard.

Tosafot dismiss this theory, arguing that one cannot distinguish between the *azara*’shalakhic status of sanctity and being present “*lifnei Hashem*.” Any area that has the formal halakhic status of the *azara*, Tosafot claim, is, by definition, considered “before the Lord.”

Tosafot proceed to cite a different answer in the name of Rabbeinu Tam, who explained, very simply, that this measure was taken for the benefit of *metzora’im* who would be able to stand under the gate and be protected from the elements. If they were forced to stand outside the gate, they would be exposed to the hot sun or rain. The decision was therefore made to exclude the area of *sha’ar Nikenor* from the formal sanctity of the *azara*, so that the *metzora’im* could be sheltered while their purification sacrifices were being offered.

Rabbeinu Tam’s comments perhaps remind us of the need to encourage and help those who seek “purification,” who wish to improve, to do what we can to make the process easier and more comfortable. Tradition teaches that those stricken with *tzara’at* were generally those who habitually committed grievous sins, for which they were punished and needed to undergo a difficult and uncomfortable process of purification. Nevertheless, at least according to Rabbeinu Tam, special measures were taken to minimize the discomfort. This perhaps teaches us that although there is never any easy way to “purify” oneself, to change and repent, we are to assist those who seek to undergo this process, offering whatever help and encouragement we can so that it will not be any more difficult that it needs to be.

Sunday

The *Chafetz Chayim*, in his famous work for which he is named (“*Chafetz Chayim*”) dedicated to the laws of *lashon ha-ra* (disparaging speech about other people), presents the guidelines for when *lashon ha-ra* is allowed for the sake of preventing harm (*Issurei Rekhilut*, 9). He begins by establishing that if a person learns that his fellow is considering entering into an arrangement with another individual which he knows will prove detrimental, he is obligated to share the relevant information with his fellow. The *Chafetz Chayim* (in *Be’er Mayim Chayim*, 1) gives the example of somebody considering hiring a certain domestic helper, and another person knows for a fact that this prospective employee has a history of committing theft. In such a case, the *Chafetz Chayim* writes, the person with this information is not only permitted to share it with the person who would otherwise be putting himself at risk, but is required to do so.

However, the *Chafetz Chayim* emphasizes that five conditions must be met for the sharing of this negative information to be permissible:

1) The individual must not instantly decide to share the information, and must instead take some time to think carefully and ensure that this is warranted. The *Chafetz Chayim* refers us here to an earlier passage in his work (*Hilkhot Lashon Ha-ra*, 10, note 6) where he explains that sharing negative information about another person must be presumed forbidden until it is ascertained that it is permissible under the circumstances. Therefore, one may not divulge negative information even for an important reason before carefully determining that this is permissible and necessary.

2) He must not embellish in presenting the relevant negative information. He may share only that which is necessary to save his fellow from harm.

3) His intention must be solely to protect his fellow from harm, and not to smear the other party. The *Chafetz Chayim* clarifies (in *Be’er Mayim Chayim*, 3)that this does not mean that one whose motives are less than pure should refrain from sharing the information. After all, one who has information that could save his fellow from harm is halakhically required to share the information. Rather, it means that he must force himself to overcome whatever feelings of hostility he might have so he speaks purely for the right reasons.

4) There must be no other possible way of protecting the vulnerable party from harm. Earlier (*Hilkhot Lashon Ha-ra*, 10, note 11), the *Chafetz Chayim* drew proof to this concept from the Gemara’s discussion in Masekhet Sanhedrin (11a) regarding the story told in Sefer Yehoshua (7) of Akhan, who stole some of the riches seized from the city of Yericho. God had commanded destroying all the property of Yericho, and He punished *Benei Yisrael*’s for Akhan’s violation by causing them to lose their next battle. God then informed Yehoshua that the defeat occurred because somebody stole forbidden property, and the Gemara relates that Yehoshua wanted God to tell him who it was so he could be reprimanded and the property returned. God replied, “Am I a talebearer?!” Instead of directly divulging the information, God instead had Yehoshua cast lots to find the culprit. The *Chafetz Chayim* notes that although Akhan committed a serious offense that had grave repercussions for the entire nation, and the Gemara elsewhere (Sanhedrin 44a) relates that Akhan also committed numerous other grievous transgressions, God refused to identify him by name, and had Yehoshua find out through other means who stole spoils of Yericho. This thus proves that divulging negative information about somebody for a vitally important purpose is forbidden if the purpose can be achieved through some other means.

5) Finally, sharing the information is allowed in such circumstances only if it would not result in grave harm to the person about whom it is spoken. If one knows that his fellow is considering a work arrangement with a third person that would be detrimental to him, he must inform his fellow of the danger – but only if the consequences will be limited to the prevention of the given arrangement. But if the fellow who hears the information will then spread it to others, who will rush to unjustly condemn and ostracize the individual in question, then sharing the information is not justified.

Monday

Amidst the *Chafetz Chayim*’s discussion of the *halakha* permitting sharing negative information about one’s fellow “*le-to’elet*” – for an important constructive purpose – he adds a footnote that appears to yield very significant ramifications: “It is possible that this is also true if one’s intention in relating [the negative information] is to ease his anxiety, that this is the same as intending for a constructive purpose…” (*Hilkhot Lashon Ha-ra*, 10:14).

The *Chafetz Chayim* seems to suggest that speaking *lashon ha-ra* is allowed not only if the listener needs to know the information for his practical benefit, but also if the speaker will experience emotional relief by talking of the wrong that somebody perpetrated against him. Achieving solace in this manner, it seems, qualifies as a “*to’elet*” – a constructive purpose for which *lashon ha-ra* is permitted. The *Chafetz Chayim* cites in this context the verse in Sefer Mishlei (12:25), “*De’aga be-leiv ish yashchena*,” which the Gemara (Yoma 75a), according to one view, interprets to mean that one who experiences anxiety should share his concerns to another person. Possibly, the *Chafetz Chayim* suggests, this applies also to relieving one’s grief and distress by speaking with a friend of his grievances against somebody else. The *Chafetz Chayim* warns, however, that all the conditions that apply to the *halakha* permitting speaking *lashon ha-ra* “*le-to’elet*” must be strictly adhered to even in such a case.

Rav Moshe Kaufman, in his *Netiv Chayim* commentary to the *Chafetz Chayim*’s work, asserts that although the *Chafetz Chayim* appears to state this *halakha* tentatively (writing, “*ve-efshar*” – “it is possible”), nevertheless, we may assume that it was stated definitively. Rav Kaufman refers us to his comments elsewhere showing that the *Chafetz Chayim* uses the word “*ve-efshar*” not to express uncertainty, but when stating a conclusion that he reached on his own, through his own reasoning and intuition, and not based on any earlier source.

Others, however, questioned this leniency. Rav Seraya Deblitzky, in his *Zeh Ha-shulchan* (p. 70), cites a letter by Rav Shmuel Hominer explaining why, in Rav Hominer’s summary of the laws of *lashon ha-ra*, he omitted this ruling. He first noted that the *Chafetz Chayim* wrote this conclusion ambivalently, raising it as a possibility, rather than issuing a definitive ruling. Secondly, this ruling, even if fundamentally correct, gives rise to the danger of people freely sharing negative information about others with the justification that they would otherwise experience grief and distress. Finally, Rav Hominer disputed the ruling itself, claiming that we are required to control our emotions and alleviate our distress without disseminating negative information about other people. (Presumably, though, even Rav Hominer would agree that one may discuss the incident with somebody for the sake of receiving practical advice and guidance for how to best handle the adverse situation.)

Moreover, the *Chafetz Chayim*’s leniency may itself be quite limited in scope. Rav Shlomo Rosner, in his work *Le-chafetz Ba-chayim* (2:1), writes that a careful distinction needs to be drawn between alleviating distress by expressing one’s feelings to somebody, and through the joy of avenging the offense by speaking about the perpetrator. If the emotional relief comes as a result of the joy of “revenge,” of spreading dislike for the person in question, then the speech is outright forbidden. The *Chafetz Chayim*’s leniency is limited to a case where one experiences some solace by sharing his feelings, not when he seeks to relieve the emotional pain through the satisfaction of “returning fire” via spreading negative information about the person. Clearly, given the nature of emotions, it is very difficult to definitively ascertain one’s motives in desiring to tell people about what was done to him, thus making it questionable whether and how the *Chafetz Chayim*’s ruling may be implemented as a practical matter.

(Based on Rav Avraham Borstein’s [article on the subject](http://shaalvim.co.il/torah/maayan-article.asp?backto=&ed=%E2%EC%E9%E5%EF%20%F0%E9%F1%EF%20%FA%F9%F2%E3&id=851) in *Ha-ma’ayan*, Nissan, 5774)

Tuesday

The Torah in Parashat Metzora tells of the sacrifices that a *metzora* is required to offer in order to complete his process of purification. Specifically, the *metzora* must bring two male sheep – one of which is offered as an *asham* (“guilt offering”), and the other as an *ola* (sacrifice entirely burnt on the altar) – as well as a female sheep for the *chatat* (“sin offering”). Additionally, the *metzora* brings flour with oil as a *mincha* offering. However, the Torah allows an impoverished *metzora* to bring a less expensive offering – just one male sheep as an *asham*, and two birds for the *ola* and *chatat* (in addition to the *mincha*).

In describing the case of a needy individual seeking purification from *tzara’at*, the Torah writes, “But if he is impoverished, and he cannot afford [the three animal sacrifices]” (14:21). A number of commentators noted that the Torah here emphasizes that this individual is “*dal*” (“impoverished”), and that he is unable to afford the complete series of sacrifices (“*ve-ein yado maseget*”). Chizkuni explains that the word “*dal*” can sometimes refer to physical meekness, as in the description of the lean cows in Pharaoh’s dream as “*dalot*” (Bereishit 41:19), and the description of Amnon, King David’s son, as appearing “*dal*” due to his overbearing lust for his half-sister (Shemuel II 13:4). Therefore, the Torah clarified that the “*dal*” individual of whom it speaks in allowing the option of a less expensive offering is one who is financially “*dal*” – meaning, hecannot afford to purchase the three large animals for the standard offering.

*Meshekh Chokhma* offers a different explanation, based on the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Nedarim (35b) regarding the possibility of offering a sacrifice on somebody else’s behalf without his consent. The Gemara there establishes that if somebody is required to bring a sacrifice to atone for a misdeed, his obligation cannot be dispensed by another person without his willful consent. If another person decides to bring the sacrifice on the sinner’s behalf, but the sinner, for whatever reason, refuses to receive this benefit from that other person, his obligation is not fulfilled through that sacrifice. This is not the case, however, when it comes to a sacrifice that is required for the purpose of purification. In four instances – a woman after childbirth, a *metzora* who has been cured, a *zav* and a *zava* (people who have experienced certain types of unusual bodily discharges) – one must offer a sacrifice not to atone for any wrongdoing, but in order to regain his or her status of purity. This obligation, the Gemara establishes, may be discharged even without the individual’s consent. The Gemara reaches this conclusion on the basis of a verse later in Parashat Metzora (“*Zot torat ha-zav*” – 15:32), which implies that the laws of *zav* apply even to children who experience this type of discharge. As a child is not allowed to offer sacrifices, necessarily, the sacrifice is offered by his parent, and thus, as a child is considered not to have halakhic *da’at* (“knowledge” – meaning, willful intent), this proves that consent is not necessary for the offering of this kind of a sacrifice. Hence, even if somebody requiring such a sacrifice expresses his refusal to allow another person to bring the sacrifice on his behalf, nevertheless, a sacrifice brought on his behalf satisfies his obligation.

On this basis, *Meshekh Chokhma* suggests a novel reading of the verse describing an impoverished *metzora*. When the Torah says that such a person is a “*dal*,” it means that he is socially impoverished, in the sense that he has no friends who, seeing his plight, would offer to come to his aid and bring the sacrifice on his behalf. Not only is he financially underprivileged, but also socially isolated, without a supportive social network to assist him and bring the required sacrifices for him. In light of his condition of hardship and isolation, the Torah allows this *metzora* the opportunity to regain his status of purity through the offering of a less expensive sacrifice.

Wednesday

Yesterday, we noted the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Nedarim (35b) regarding the case of a *mechusar kippurim* – an individual who requires a sacrifice in order to complete his process of purification. The four cases of a *mechusar kippurim* are a woman after childbirth, a *metzora*, a *zav* (man who experienced an unusual bodily discharge) and a *zava* (woman who experienced an unusual bodily discharge). In all four cases, the individual is considered *tamei* (impure) and the process of purification concludes with the offering of a sacrifice. The Gemara infers from the verse which concludes the Torah’s discussion of a *zav* and *zava* – “*Zot torat ha-zav*” (15:32) – that these laws apply even to a child who experiences this kind of discharge. As a child may not offer sacrifices, the child’s sacrifice in this case must, necessarily, be brought by a parent. The Gemara establishes on this basis that the sacrifice of a *mechusar kippurim* differs from other sacrifices in that it fulfills the *tamei* individual’s obligation even it is brought without his knowledge and against his will.

The *Minchat Chinukh* (176:8) raises the question of whether this unique provision applies to all sacrifices required of a *mechusar kippurim*, or only those which are indispensable for the individual’s regaining his or her halakhic purity. In all four instances of a *mechusar kippurim*, the sacrifice consists of both an *ola* and a *chatat* (12:6, 14:19, 15:14, 15:29), and in the case of a *metzora*, the individual must also bring an *asham* (14:12). In all cases, the individual becomes fully *tahor* (pure), and thus allowed to partake of sacrifices, after bringing the *chatat*, even if he did not yet bring the *ola*. Although he bears an obligation to offer the *ola*, his status of purity does not hinge on the offering of this sacrifice (Rambam, *Hilkhot Mechusarei Kapara* 1:5, based on *Torat Kohanim*). There is a difference of opinion among the *Acharonim* as to whether the *asham* required of a *metzora* is like the *chatat*, and indispensable for the individual’s regaining his purity (*Kesef Mishneh*), or like the *ola*, and not indispensable for regaining his purity (*Lechem Mishneh*). In any event, the *Minchat Chinukh* poses the question of whether all the sacrifices required of a *mechusar kippurim* are subject to the unique law that allows the requirement to be fulfilled without the individual’s consent, or only the *chatat* (and perhaps the *asham* of a *metzora*, if it, too, is indispensable for the *metzora*’s purification).

The rationale for this distinction, as some have explained, is that it might be specifically for the sake of an individual’s purification that the Torah made an exception and allowed the requirement to be fulfilled without his or her knowledge or consent. When it comes to a person’s halakhic obligations, the person must himself make the decision to fulfill his requirement. But for achieving a state of halakhic purity, the Torah made a special provision that even others can offer the necessary sacrifice.

Rav Raphael Katz of Hamburg, in his *She’eilat Ha-kohanim Torah* (p. 88), infers this distinction from the text of the Mishna in Masekhet Negaim (14:12) in presenting the law authorizing a parent to offer the sacrifices required of a child who had become *tamei*. The Mishna states that the parent may offer the required sacrifices “*u-ma’akhilan bi-zvachim*” – and then feed the child sacrifices. This text is cited also by the Rambam (*Hilkhot Mechusarei Kapara* 1:5). The emphasis on the child being fed sacrifices after the parent’s offering the purification sacrifice might suggest that this provision is limited to the purification sacrifices required for the child to become fully pure. When it comes to the other sacrifices required of a *mechusar kippurim* – which are obligatory but not indispensable for the person to become *tahor* – it would seem that a parent would be unable to offer the sacrifices for a child. And, by the same token, these sacrifices would not be able to be offered on behalf of an individual without his consent.

However, the *Minchat Chinukh* (as well as Rav Katz, in that same passage) notes that the Ran, in his commentary to Masekhet Nedarim, appears to indicate otherwise. The Ran writes that the distinction appear to lie between sacrifices offered for atonement, which require an individual’s consent, and those which are required strictly for regaining halakhic purification, which do not. This would certainly suggest that all sacrifices required of a *mechusar kippurim*, including those which are not indispensable for his purification, are subject to this unique provision.

Thursday

Parashat Metzora begins by outlining the procedure to be followed by a *metzora* in order to regain his state of purity after he is cured of his *tzara’at* infection. The first step of this process, the Torah instructs, is that a *kohen* goes to the *metzora* outside his city – where the *metzora* was required to reside after being declared impure – to confirm that the infection is cured.

Rav Mordechai Ha-kohen of Tzefat, in his *Siftei Kohen* commentary, notes the significance of this first stage of the process – the *kohen*’s trek outside the city to declare that the *metzora* has been cured. When a person is declared a *metzora*, the *Siftei Kohen* writes, he is forced to endure a great deal of humiliation. As the Torah instructs earlier (13:45-46), he must leave his city, and announce to everybody that he is impure so they know to keep a distance from him. The *Siftei Kohen* explains that the *kohen*’s visit to the *metzora* after he is cured is intended to reverse this process of humiliation. As the *kohen* made his way outside the city, he attracted a great deal of attention. The *Siftei Kohen* envisions a cadre of young *kohanim* joining the *kohen* in order to observe and learn the procedure, and the townspeople asking the *kohen* where he was going, and then being told that he was going to declare the purity of the *metzora*. Just as the declaration of the individual as a *metzora* created a “buzz” throughout the city, the declaration of his renewed state of purity would likewise draw lots of attention.

Very often, when somebody is disgraced, and determined “impure,” having been found guilty of some form of misconduct, the news rapidly spreads and creates a stir – in many cases, justifiably so. The subject draws a lot of attention, and becomes a major topic of conversation. The *Siftei Kohen*’s depiction of the *kohen*’s trip to visit the cured *metzora* perhaps teaches that we should be paying as much attention to people’s “purification” as we do to their “impurity.” While certain forms of “impurity” warrant public condemnation, and the ostracization of the violators, the same degree of attention must be given to the violators’ sincere remorse and penitence. We cannot condemn wrongdoing without acknowledging and respecting repentance. Just as the *metzora* is publicly disgraced on his way out of the city upon being declared impure, he is publicly welcomed back into the city upon being declared pure – teaching us of the need to celebrate repentance with at least the same level of fervor with which we condemned the offense.

Friday

The opening section of Parashat Metzora describes the procedure through which a *metzora* regains his status of halakhic purity. Throughout the Torah’s description, it is clear that the *kohen* plays the dominant role in this process. The *kohen* must go outside the city to the *metzora* to affirm that the infection has been cured (14:3), and the *kohen* instructs bringing the birds and other materials for the purification ceremony (14:4). He conducts this ceremony, and then, during the second stage of the process, he performs the various rituals involving the sacrifices and oil which the *metzora* is required to bring.

On the other hand, the Torah on numerous occasions in this section refers to the *metzora* as the “*mitaher*” (simply translated, “person being purified”). *Meshekh Chokhma* (14:4) comments on the grammatical construction of this word, which is in the “*hitpael*” form, which denotes a reflexive action. This construction is used in reference to something a person does towards himself, as opposed to an action directed outward. Significantly, the Torah speaks of the *metzora* not as “being purified,” but rather as purifying himself. *Meshekh Chokhma* explains that the *metzora*’s purification hinges upon his efforts to repent and improve, to cleanse his inner being, no less than it depends upon the *kohen*’s strict compliance with the guidelines presented by the Torah.

We are accustomed to delegating many different aspects of our lives, leaving to other people to take care of the things we need. We hire people to provide goods and services that we require, reserving for ourselves as few personal responsibilities as possible in order to spare ourselves unnecessary work and inconvenience. Our personal growth, however, cannot ever be delegated. Even if we find a “*kohen*” in our lives to help motivate and guide us, a person or group of people on whom we rely for inspiration and direction, we cannot leave all the work to them. The description of the *metzora* in this section as a “*mitaher*” reminds us that we need to take responsibility for ourselves, that we cannot passively wait for others to inspire and motivate us to maximize our full potential. Spiritual excellence cannot be delegated, and can be achieved only through our own proactive work and effort.

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