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HIDDEN TREASURE

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

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BATSHEVA SHEKHTER ('20)
PENINA KAHANE ('22)
AVICHAI SHEKHTER ('22)
REBECCA ADLER ('23)

Sometimes, when thinking about what to write for a dvar Torah, it takes time to find just the right piece of Torah to share, especially if you are trying to share a relevant message. This week's parsha has all the pieces to the puzzle!

In this week's double parsha, the Torah discusses the laws of a *metzora*. The *metzora* is punished with a *nega*, a blemish. This *nega* requires him to live outside of all the camps of Bnei Yisrael, alone. In other words, he must quarantine himself because of the lashon hara that he spoke. While the gemara (Arachin 15-16) lists a few other reasons for which one may receive *tzara'at*, the main reason for this punishment is the sin of speaking lashon hara.

While this *metzora* is sitting alone, he is supposed to introspect and recognize what he said that caused a divide among his fellow Jews and realize his mistake. His solitude is a time for introspection.

This is something that we can all relate to.

However, the Torah continues to share with us that there are two other forms of *tzara'at*. *Tzara'at* can be found on one's clothing and on the walls of a person's home.

Why a home? The gemara (Arachin 16a) explains that a person will receive *tzara'at* on their home as a punishment for *tzara'at ayin* -- stinginess. As a result of their punishment, they will have to take everything out of their home so that everyone will see that they were stricken with *tzara'at*.

However, Rashi (Vayikra 14:34) quotes the midrash that relates that having *tzara'at* in one's home actually turned out to be very beneficial: The Emorim who

lived in Cana'an hid their valuables in the walls of their homes so that the Jewish people would not be able to benefit from them when they conquered and took over the land. There would have been no way for the Jews to find these treasures in the normal course of events. Therefore, Hashem placed *tzara'at* on the part of the wall where the treasure was concealed, so that the stones hiding it would be removed, thus revealing the fortune (see Drash Moshe, Parshat Metzora, 14:34 for a beautiful explanation as to why the person is given a reward, if it's a punishment).

An obvious question that one can ask is, if Hashem wanted to reward us and shower us with wealth, why do it in this way? Why send the *tzara'at* to the home?

Rabbi Moshe Weinberger shares a beautiful insight regarding this midrash. The Torah is teaching us that there is treasure underneath the *ne'gaim*. In life we go through struggles and dark situations. We all have moments of *tzara'at*, moments where life seems rough and we feel like we are all alone. When all of our "normal" way of living is thrown out of our home. What we need to remember is that there is always a treasure at the end of the *tzara'at*.

If we look at the Hebrew word צרעת, we find the words עת צר: a time for pain. Experiencing a time of suffering will only make a person recognize how to speak, what's important, and how to grow from the painful situations.

May we all merit to come out of our "*tzara'at* situation" with greater clarity, understanding, and growth.

HAVE THE COURAGE

BATSHEVA SHEKHTER ('20)

This week's parsha, Parshat Tazria-Metzora, explains the laws regarding *tzara'at*, an infliction on a person's body, home, or belongings, as a punishment for speaking lashon hara. If a person suspects that they have *tzara'at*, they are instructed to go to a kohen to determine if the rash is in fact *tzara'at*. Afterward, the person is isolated from the community and then allowed to return after purifying themselves in a mikvah.

In the Torah, there are two specific examples of people being inflicted with *tzara'at*. The first is Moshe in Sefer Shemot. After being instructed to tell Bnei Yisrael that Hashem will save them from slavery in Egypt, Moshe is given three signs to prove Hashem's power: his staff will turn into a snake, his hand will be inflicted with *tzara'at*, and water poured onto the ground will turn to blood. Rashi asks why one of the signs was *tzara'at*, a disease experienced by someone who spoke lashon hara. He answers in accordance with the Midrash Rabbah that Moshe spoke lashon hara about Bnei Yisrael to Hashem by claiming that they would not listen to him about being saved and was therefore inflicted with *tzara'at*. The second instance of *tzara'at* is Miriam in Sefer Bamidbar. Miriam spoke about Moshe's marriage to Tzipporah and questioned whether or not Moshe thinks he is better than his siblings. She was then confronted by Hashem's *shechina* and was stricken with *tzara'at*.

The purpose of these two instances being mentioned explicitly is to show the difficulty of not speaking lashon hara, that even two great tzaddikim struggled with this prohibition. Today, when we do not have the disease of tzara'at, it is even harder to keep this mitzvah because there is no immediate repercussion for violating it. However, we are human beings who will make mistakes, as proven by even the greatest people in Jewish history. The Torah gives us this prohibition because the horrible effects of gossiping about others are clear, even though it is hard to abide by.

We learn from this that although many mitzvot in the Torah are difficult to keep, especially today when modern culture promotes values that are sometimes at odds with halachic morals, they are given to us for a reason. Hashem knows what is best for us and commands us with mitzvot to help us live moral and just lives. Despite the hardships that may be associated with keeping certain mitzvot, we are given the chance every day to try our best to abide by Hashem's guide for life. May we all be privileged to have the courage to stop and walk away from gossip.

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TIME TO REFLECT

PENINA KAHANE ('22)

Parshat Tazria-Metzora discusses purity and impurity. It spends a great deal of time specifically on *tzara'at*. The parsha then goes on to discuss how having *tzara'at* makes you impure and the steps you must take to become pure once again.

כָּל יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר הַנֶּגַע בּוֹ יִטְמָא טָמֵא הוּא בָּדָד
יֵשֵׁב מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשָׁבוֹ

"He shall be unclean as long as the disease is on him. Being unclean, he shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside the camp" (13:46).

Tzara'at is not contagious and if the reason you get it is because you spoke lashon hara, then why does one have to be isolated in order to regain a pure status? The only way one would be sent out of the camp is if the kohen knew that he had *tzara'at*.

In *Emet L'Yaakov*, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky explains that *tzara'at* is not a public matter, but rather a private one. Getting sent out of the camp for seven days is not a punishment, rather it is there in order to help the afflicted person. When surrounded by people, a person with *tzara'at* would not have the proper space needed to reflect on his sin. Hashem punishes with *tzara'at* since its effect is directed towards the one who sinned. Tzara'at is a direct message from Hashem, telling the person that they need to refocus their priorities and that something is off. So, being isolated from the rest of the community gives you a bigger opportunity to reflect on yourself and your actions. Let's use this time now to reflect on our actions and form a stronger relationship with Hashem. Let's also take this message and realize that not everything is a punishment even if it seems like it is; there is always a deeper reason.

LOOK WITHIN

AVICHAI SHEKHTER ('22)

We learn in Parshat Tazria that a person who has contracted צרעת must go outside of the camp. Whenever someone would get near them, they were required to call out וְטָמֵא טָמֵא יִקְרָא. (13:45), warning that they are impure and no one should get close. The Gemara Moed Katan (5a) suggests that there are two reasons the מצורע needs to say this. One is so that the people that are coming closer know that he is impure and not to come closer or they will become impure. The second reason is so that the people coming closer would become aware and daven for him.

The Kotzker Rebbe brilliantly reads something deeper here. He places the comma in the middle of the statement. The Torah says וְטָמֵא טָמֵא יִקְרָא he must call out וְטָמֵא טָמֵא. The Kotzker says we should place a comma after the first וְטָמֵא and read it as: "as for this person who is impure" – טָמֵא יִקְרָא – his problem is that he calls out to others, "you are impure." He doesn't attribute any weakness or negativity in character to himself. His problem is that he's complaining about the negatives in others all the time. That's why he becomes impure in the first place.

The gemara in Kiddushin says there are many people who criticize others regarding weaknesses in their character, but actually they are talking about themselves. To illustrate this point, consider the following *mashal*.

An elderly man once went to his doctor and said: "I think my wife is going deaf."

"How serious is this?," asked the doctor.

The elderly man replied, "I don't know, she's just not hearing me."

The doctor responded, "Well, why don't you call out to her when her back is turned and see how close you have to get before she hears you."

So he stood well behind her as she was standing in the living room and he called out, "What's for supper tonight?" No answer.

He came a few steps closer, "What's for supper tonight?" No answer. A few steps further, no answer.

Eventually, he stood just behind her and called out, "What's for supper tonight?" This time she turned

around and shouted at him, "Fish and chips, as I've already told you five times!"

She wasn't the one who had a problem – it was him!

In life we have to recognize these moments and ask ourselves where have we gone wrong and what can we do to be better. We must learn a lesson from וְטָמֵא טָמֵא יִקְרָא, and if we approach life with this mindset, the world will be a much better place. Shabbat Shalom.

A BATTLE FOR THE AGES

REBECCA ADLER ('23)

In this week's parsha, we learn about the strange punishment of *tzara'at*, a physical manifestation of a spiritual disease. The pasuk states,

וְצִוָּה הַכֹּהֵן וְלָקַח לַמִּטַהֵר שְׁתֵּי צִפֳּרִים חַיּוֹת
טְהֹרוֹת וְעֵץ אֶרֶז וּשְׁנִי תוֹלַעַת וְאֵזֹב

"Then the kohen shall order, and the person to be cleansed shall take two live clean birds, a cedar stick, a strip of crimson [wool], and hyssop" (Vayikra 14:4).

This is one of the actions that the person with *tzara'at* has to do: offer a korban. Rashi comments on this, saying that the thick cedar represents the arrogant person punished with *tzara'at*, while the thin reeds represent the humility that the inflicted person strives to acquire by repenting to Hashem. How can the *metzora*, one who has *tzara'at*, be humble and arrogant at the same time? The answer is that he can't. He needs to choose. The thick piece of cedar is the *yetzer hara*. The evil inclination encourages the *metzora* to continue in his ways of gossiping and sinning. It tells him not to repent or daven to Hashem. On the other hand, the reeds are the *yetzer hatov*. The positive inclination tells the *metzora* to recognize his mistakes and ask for forgiveness. It persuades him to listen to Hashem's laws and commandments to respect one another. Previously, the *metzora* chose to listen to his *yetzer hara*. Therefore, he goes into days of isolation to self reflect and choose between the *yetzer hara* and *yetzer tov*. Will he be the role model who doesn't speak lashon hara or will he be the gossiper who everyone contacts to know the latest community juice?

Although *tzara'at* does not exist today, the same situation happens with us. We have the choice to listen to the *yetzer hara* or the *yetzer tov*. Similar to a *metzora*, during quarantine we have the opportunity to self reflect and see whether we let the *yetzer hara* win. We can choose to be like the arrogant thick cedar or the humble thin reeds -- don't let the *yetzer hara* win!

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