

The Mother's Fowl Sacrifice and the Concept of Loyalty

And at the completion of her pure days for a son or a daughter, she shall bring a yearling sheep as a burnt-offering, and a dove or a turtledove as a sin-offering, to the entrance of the Tent of the Meeting, to the Kohan (Lev. 12:6). The *Baal HaTurim* (here) notes that whenever the Torah prescribes a sacrifice of birds, it always mentions the turtledove before the dove (*yonah*), except for here where the dove is mentioned before the turtledove. This is because when a new mother brings an animal as a burnt-offering, then she only brings one bird for her sin-offering, so it is preferable for her to bring a dove rather than a turtledove. This is because turtledoves only mate once for life and, if one sacrifices a single turtledove, then its spouse will mourn over that loss and never pair up with another bird instead (see also Rabbeinu Bachaya to Lev. 1:14 about this). [However, the Talmud (*Kreisos* 28a) cites Rabbi Shimon as saying that even though whenever the Torah prescribes a sacrifice of birds, it always mentions the pigeon before the turtledove, the fact that here the Torah mentions the turtledove before the pigeons demonstrates that the two are actually equal, and none is given preference over the other. This is at odds with the *Baal HaTurim's* understanding that in general offering a pigeon is more optimal, except in the case of a new mother who brings an animal as a burnt-offering, in which case she should preferably bring a turtledove for her sin-offering.]

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Divnsk (in *Meshech Chochmah*) discusses why a new mother who can afford an animal burnt-offering it is still obligated to bring a bird as her sin-offering. He explains that according to Rabbi Shimon (*Niddah* 31b) a mother is obligated to bring a sacrifice because as she experiences the pain of childbirth, she is presumed to have sworn that she will never again engage in intimacy with her husband to avoid having to go through the same situation again. Because of this, her atonement is to bring a turtledove which is a bird that always remains loyal to its spouse.¹

¹ Rabbi Meir Simcha also explains why the new mother must bring a burnt-offering. He writes that during the woman's period of impurity after birth, she is banned from entering the Temple, and now that she has passed that time, she becomes permitted to enter the Temple. Because of this, just like when a man pilgrimages to the Temple he must not come empty-handed but is obligated to bring a burnt-offering, known as an *olas reiyah* ("burnt-offering of seeing," in the Temple), so does a mother who can now enter the Temple bring such a burnt-offering. He notes that ibn Gabirol in his poetic rendition of the 613 commandments (65) calls the burnt-offering of a mother "a sacrifice of the one being seen".

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Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS TAZRIA

I saw in the name of Rabbi Saadia Gaon (in *HaTorah HaTemimah* to Song of Songs 1:15, p. 32) that the nature of doves is that after they leave the nest, they constantly look back towards figuring out how they can return to their nests, and that the same is true of the Jewish People. Even if a person somehow distances himself from Hashem, he does not totally break of any connection to Hashem. Rather he also regrets his actions and looks forward to a time when he will reconcile with the One above. He finds a hint to this in Song of Songs 1:15 which reads “Behold you are beautiful, my beloved, behold you are beautiful... your eyes are like doves.” Certainly when the Jewish People are His beloved, they are considered beautiful, but this passage tells us that even when they are not His beloved, they are still considered beautiful. The reason for is the that the Jewish People are like turtledoves in that they are always loyal to Hashem just like a dove is always loyal to its spouse.

I also found a similar idea in the name of Rabbi Chaim Berlin (cited in *Otzaros HaAggadah* by Rabbi Aharon Zakkai, *Drashos Shir HaShirim* #2, p. 13). It is told about Rabbi Chaim Berlin that whenever he would read Song of Songs of Erev Shabbos, he would start crying when he reached Song of Songs 1:15. Somebody once asked why he was crying specifically at the verse, and he explained with a story: One time back when Rabbi Chaim Berlin was a rabbi in Russia, an assimilated Jew once asked him to come with him to circumcise his newly-born child. After a grueling trip to the man’s house, Rabbi Chaim Berlin was surprised to see no outwardly Jewish signs at the man’s house. After performing the circumcision, Rabbi Chaim Berlin asked the man what on earth drove him to travel such a far distance to bring a *mohel* to circumcise his son, if he otherwise seems to have no connection at all to Judaism, and apparently due to this mans position with the government, where it was not known that he was Jewish, circumcising his child was a great risk, such that the ceremony was done in secrecy. The man replied that indeed he had nothing to do with Judaism and does not plan for his son to have any more connection to Judaism than he does. However, he said that he was still interested in allowing his son a chance to come close to Hashem *should he decide to do so*, by giving him the very minimum required—a circumcision. Rabbi Chaim Berlin, like Rabbi Saadia Gaon, understood that Song of Songs 1:15 teaches us that even if a person somehow distances himself from Hashem, he does not totally break of any connection to Hashem. Rather he also regrets his actions and looks forward to a time when he will reconcile with the One above. This is what motivated the man to get his son circumcised,

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and what brought Rabbi Chaim Berlin to tears. (For more about this story, see also *Hirburei Teshuvah* by Doron Gold 11, p. 130 and *Raayanos LeDrush* p. 223 by R. Yechiel Michel Stern).

Converts and *Tzaraas*

A man—when he has in the skin of his flesh a seis or sapachas or baheres, and there is in the skin of his flesh an affliction of tzaraas... (Lev. 13:2). The Talmud (*Kiddushin* 70b) cites Rabbi Chlebo's declaration that converts are as problematic to the Jewish People as a *sapachas* is. The same statement is codified by Maimonides (Laws of Forbidden Sexual Unions 13:18), "Converts are a difficult to the Jewish People as an affliction of *tzaraas*". Why are converts specifically compared to *tzaraas*? The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 17:3) writes that *tzaraas* comes as a punishment for ten types of sin: ¹) idolatry ²) sexual impropriety ³) murder ⁴) desecrating the name of Hashem ⁵) blasphemy ⁶) stealing from the public-at-large ⁷) stealing from that which is not his ⁸) haughtiness ⁹) slander ¹⁰) stinginess. From this Midrashic passage, it seems that *tzaraas* comes as a punishment or retribution for one who sins. However, another Midrashic source (*Vayikra Rabbah* 17:6, cited by Rashi to Lev. 14:34) explains that Hashem promised to bring an affliction of *tzaraas* on people's houses so that they would have to tear down their walls and find the treasures which the Canaanites hid in anticipation of the Jewish conquest of the Holy Land. This suggests that *tzaraas* serves to bring reward, not punishment. Rabbi Chanoch Zundel of Bialystok (*Eitz Yosef* there) addresses this contradiction by explaining that there is a Midrashic dispute over whether *tzaraas* comes for a good reason or to bring punishment. Nonetheless, the true is that there is no disagreement between these two sources. Rather, what all of this means to teach us is that even something which is intended to punish also brings us good. "Fortunate is the man whom Hashem has afflicted" (Ps.), which the *Sefas Emes* (*Metzvorah* 1886) explains is because there are hidden treasures within the punishment. With this in mind, we can understand the connection between converts and *tzaraas*. The Talmud says that Hashem only sent the Jewish People into exile in order that holy converts from the nations of the world should be able to join them (*Pesachim* 87b). Now concerning the very concept of exile, we know that it serves as a punishment for our sins, but it is also a means for Hashem to bring us a good. In this way, converts also represent this dichotomy, enormous treasure that comes through hardship. They are good for the Jewish People, but in another way, they bring bad because collecting these holy souls is the reason behind the exile. This is comparable to *tzaraas* which

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is one way is good because it helped uncover Canaanite treasure, but in another way was bad because it was punishment.

Painful worms

A man—when he has in the skin of his flesh... (Lev. 13:2). Rabbi Chaim Palagi in *Pnei Chaim* (Shuvi Nafshi ed., pg. 185) writes that the first letters of each word in the phrase “A man—when he has in the skin” (אדם כי יהיה בעור) spells out the word “it is painful” (יכאב), while the last letters of those words spells out the word “worm” (רימה). He explains that this alludes to what the Mishnah (*Avos* 4:4) teaches: “One should be *very very* humble-spirited in the face of other people, for the greatest hope of mankind is worms.” The commentators explain the meaning of the Mishnah’s exhortation based on a Talmudic passage about death. It says “But while his flesh is upon, it is painful, and his soul upon him he will mourn” which the Talmud (*Brachos* 18b) explains refers to the fact that as long as one’s flesh still exists after he has died and been buried, death is as painful to him as a needle being stuck into the flesh of a live person. Because of this severe pain in this state, man generally hopes that his body turn into worms as soon as possible, so he won’t feel the pain. Accordingly, the Mishnah means that a person should lower himself while he’s alive and not assert himself too much vis-à-vis others, because after all once a person dies, the **best he can hope for** is to quickly decompose into worm fodder—the lowest of all creatures. Since the best he can hope for is to be a low creature, he may as well start the process before he dies. Rabbi Palagi further explains that this idea is alluded to in the verse at hand which spells out “it is painful” and “worm” which putting the two and two together teaches us that a person should not be haughty in his lifetime. Moreover, Rabbi Palagi explains that this is also hinted to in the word “man” (אדם) which the Talmud (*Sotah* 5a) says serves as an acronym for “ashes, blood, and bile” (אפר, דם, מרה)—all uncomplimentary elements of man’s body highlighting our mortality. Alternatively, Rabbi Palagi notes that “man” (אדם) can also be read as an acronym for the names of three men in specific: Avraham, Dovid, and Moshe (אברהם, דוד, משה).² All three of these men were known to have expressed their great humility in somewhat self-deprecating statements. Avraham said: “And I [am but] dirt and ashes” (Gen. 18:27), Dovid said, “And I [am but] a worm, not a man” (Ps. 22:7), and Moshe said along with his brother Aharon, “And what are we?” (Ex. 16:7).

² The Arizal and others say something somewhat different. They contend that Adam (אדם) is an acronym for Adam, Dovid, Moshiach.

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When the Torah records the rites required for purifying a leper, it says, “And the Kohen will command, and he will take for the one being purified two live, pure birds, cedar wood, a worm, and a hyssop” (Lev. 14:4). Rashi explains that the cedar wood is meant to allude to the fact that *tzaraas* is said to punish haughtiness, represented by the cedar tree which grows tall. The Chida in *Nachal Kedumim* (*Metzora* 1) writes in the name of *Zichron Yosef* that a certain philosopher said that because man eats animals, then man has a certain degree of sovereignty over the animals, which is what justifies man using animals for their own needs, like carrying loads or plowing fields. He records that a different philosopher questioned this assertion by asking that if it is true, then when worms eat people’s body in their graves, this should imply that worms rule over man, but in what way do we find that worms rule over man? Either way, we see from this that worms can overcome man if man is haughty. This is alluded to in the rites for purifying a leper which call for a worm (שני תולעת) which can be read as “second [to the] worm”, an allusion what happens to the corpses of haughty men after their death—they become worm fodder.

Rabbi Palagi further explains that this might be the intent of the Mishnah that says, “He who has a lot of meat, has a lot of worms” (*Avos* 4:7). This means that if a person who so harried to follow his animalistic urges that he is constantly looking to eat more animals, birds, and fish to indulge himself, then Hashem will punish him accordingly and make sure that the worms will eat him in the same fashion after he dies.

Ten Sins

An affliction of tzaraas, when it is in a person, and he will be brought to the Kohen (Lev. 13:9). As we mentioned above, the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* §17:3) writes that *tzaraas* comes as a punishment for ten types of sin: 1) idolatry 2) sexual impropriety 3) murder 4) desecrating the name of Hashem 5) blasphemy 6) stealing from the public-at-large 7) stealing from that which is not his 8) haughtiness 9) slander 10) stinginess. Rabbi Avraham Saba (*Tzror HaMor* to Ex. 9:29 and Lev. 13:9) writes that these ten sins correspond to the Ten Commandments, as assertion also found in *Baal HaTurim* (Lev. 13:59). See Rabbi Chaim Palagi’s *Pnei Chaim* (Ex. 20:1–2) who explains how exactly each of these ten sins corresponds to a specific one of the Ten Commandments. Rabbeinu Bachaya (to Lev. 14:37) similarly writes that the ten types of *tzaraas* mentioned in the Torah correspond to the Ten Commandments.

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PARSHAS TAZRIA

The Big G

And he shall be shaven (Lev. 13:34). The letter ג in the word “and he shall be shaven” (והתגלח) is written bigger than usual. The Chida (in *Chomas Anach* 7) explains that this is because one of the sins for which *tzaraas* is brought as a punishment is the sin of stinginess. The opposite of that attitude is one who provides for others, known as *gemilus chasadim*. The word *gemilus* is derived from the letter ג, which is called *gimmel*. Rabbi Chaim Palagi explains that the oversized ג serves as an allusion to the uniqueness of the Jewish People who called a “singular nation” (Deut. 4:7) or in Hebrew, *goy echad* (גוי אחד). He explains that this allusion appears specifically in the context of the leper’s haircut because a Jew should only get a haircut from another Jew, as the Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 29a) warns about the dangers of getting a haircut from a non-Jew, as do Kabbalistic sources.

Metzora 5779

The Righteous man purifies

On the day of his purification, and he will be brought to the Kohen (Lev. 14:2). The Gerrer Rebbe in *Lev Simcha* said (as cited in *Likkutei Yehudah*, p. 147) that this passage alludes to the fact that when a person comes to the righteous man (i.e. the Kohen), then he will be made pure.

Burning Humility

...cedar wood, a worm, and a hyssop (Lev. 14:4). Rashi explains that the cedar wood is meant to allude to the fact that *tzaraas* is said to punish haughtiness, represented by the cedar tree which grows tall, while the hyssop is a short bush which hints to the idea of humility. The *Likkutei Yehudah* (p. 148) writes in the name of the *Chiddushei Harim* that both the cedar and hyssop are burnt, even though only the cedar alludes to an undesirable character trait, because the hyssop can also represent an undesired character trait. That is, sometimes one will humble himself like a hyssop, but then feel that he deserves more because he has humbled himself. This character trait too must be eliminated. Rather, the humble person should not feel as though he “humbled” himself, but that he truly does not have any right to be haughty at all. For this reason, we also get rid of the hyssop. This is a nice idea, the only problem is that when we speak about purifying the leper, neither are burnt. This really should have been printed in Parashas Chukas when discussing the rites of the Red Heifer which calls for burning the cedar wood and hyssop.

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Is *tzaraas* natural?

When you enter the Land of Canaan, that I am giving to you as a heritage, and I will put afflictions of tzaraas in the houses of the land of your inheritance (Lev. 14:34).

Maimonides (Laws of Impurity of Tzaraas 16:10) writes that the entire concept of *tzaraas* is a miraculous thing which Hashem brings to the Jewish People in order to warn them against speaking slander. Accordingly, if one speak slander, the walls of his house will first change color, and if he repents that sin, they will become pure again. If he remains obstinate and continues to slander, after his entire house is destroyed, then his cloth items (like clothes are bed linens) will begin to change colors, but if he repents his sins, then they too will be come pure again. If he still persists in his sin after his clothes have all been burnt, then his skin will change colors and he will be publicly ostracized and nobody will want to have anything to do with him until he renounces slander and scorn. The Munkatcher Rebbe (*Divrei Torah* §5:70) points out that Maimonides seems to contradict himself concerning the miraculous nature of *tzaraas*. In the above-mentioned passage, Maimonides asserted that *tzaraas* is a wholly miraculous feat, while in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:47), Maimonides writes that *tzaraas* is a contagious disease—implying that it is something natural. In the end, the Munkatcher Rebbe concludes that some unscrupulous individual toyed with Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* and added to it ideas concerning the reasons of the *mitzvos* which Maimonides himself would not have approved of. The truth is, that there is no real contradiction, because in his Laws of Impurity of *Tzaraas*, Maimonides only wrote that *tzaraas* of the house and clothes is miraculous, said nothing about *tzaraas* on the body. In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides only wrote that *tzaraas* of the body is natural, but said nothing about *tzaraas* of the house or clothes.

The Curse of the Fourth

When you enter the Land of Canaan, that I am giving to you as a heritage, and I will put afflictions of tzaraas in the houses of the land of your inheritance (Lev. 14:34).

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 17:5) explains that the Torah stresses that the land belongs to the Canaanites to teach us a lesson: Just as Noah's son Ham was the one who castrated Noah, yet Ham's son Canaan was the one whom Noah cursed, so do the Jewish People sin, but the land gets cursed, not them. Rabbi Zev Wolf Einhorn adds another layer to this comparison by noting that just as Canaan was Ham's fourth son, and Ham's curse went to

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his fourth son, so is the Jews' land listed fourth after the three forefathers in Lev. 26:42, so the land assumes whatever curse comes about from the Jews' sins.

Only Like an affliction, but not really an affliction

Like an affliction appears to me on the house (Lev. 14:35). Rabbi Yonasan Shteif (*Amaros, Metzora* 16) writes that this can be understood based on what Rashi said earlier (Lev. 14:34) that the point of *tzaraas* on the house is to help uncover the treasures hidden by the Canaanites. Accordingly, in this case, he says “*like* an affliction” to stress that what he has is not a real affliction (which is a punishment), but only resembles it. He notes that he heard a similar thing from Rabbi Gavriel Neischloss to explain the Mishnah (see *Shabbos* 29b) that if one extinguished a candle on Shabbos because he כנס “like spares the candle” then he is liable for extinguishing a flame. The Mishnah uses the word “like” because really if he cared about the monetary value of the candle, he would not have extinguished the candle, because all expenses incurred in observing the Shabbos are paid back with interest (*Beitzab* 16a). So it is only “like” he cared about it, but really he didn’t gain anything. He also explains that the reason why *tzaraas* sometimes comes to houses is as a punishment to people who start to think that their house really “belongs” to them, without recognizing the temporary nature of This World.

And a man—when semen comes out of him... (Lev. 15:16). The *Ricanati* (cited by the *Yalkut Reuveni*) cites some Kabbalists who write that the pubic hairs which surround the foreskin allude to the powers of impurity which surround the Upper Covenant, such that when a person releases semen for no reason, those powers are enveloped in the impurity spirits there and are now released into the world and can cause havoc.

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