

Metzora

Diseases, Pigs and Reincarnation

This is to be the rule for the metzora

Vayikra 14:2

Metzora, taught Resh Lakish, aside from meaning a person with *tzaraas*, is also an acronym for *motzi shem rah*, a person who spreads slander.¹ Thus, the *passuk* describing the elaborate process that must be done for the person with *tzaraas* can also be read, “This is to be the rule for those who spread slander.”

“There were ten measures of *tzaraas* affliction given to this world. Nine of those were taken by pigs.”² The pig, in Hebrew *chazir*, is referred to at times as a *davar acher*,³ “that other thing,” to avoid saying the name of the filthy animal. And the same appellation is applied to the disease of *tzaraas*.⁴ What is the nature of this disease, and what does it share in common with the pig?

According to the *Shulchan Aruch*,⁵ “One should not eat meat and fish together, for he could

1 Arachin 15b

2 Kiddushin 49b

3 Shabbos 129b, and see Rashi, s.v. *bidavar*, and Sanhedrin 26b. See also the comments of R. Moshe Blau in his *Zichron Shalom* to Brachos 25a, where he explains that since a pig shows himself to be something other than what he is – by showing his hooves to make one think that he is kosher – his very name is “the other thing,” for he is something other than he appears. This would, therefore, even apply to using the term “pig” in English, and an alternative for those who would prefer to avoid mentioning that word would be “that other thing.” In another suggestion, he explains that the pig is called *chazir*, which means “return,” since it will one day be kosher (as we are taught in Midrash Shocher Tov 146; see also Rabbenu Bechaye Vayikra 11:4); therefore, it is a “*davar acher*” today from what it will be eventually. See also the *Sefer Notrikon* (by R. Yosef Teomim, author of *Pri Megadim*), page 33b, where he quotes the Tishbi (s.v. *davar*), who asserts that the reason that they did not call the pig by its proper name is because we do not want people to think about it, and consequently eat it, just as we do not mention bread on Pesach. He then quotes “one wise man,” who explained that although the Midrash says that the pig will one day be kosher, this is not a literal statement, but it is one with much depth. Since simple people are likely to take this literally, and they will then conclude that the Torah is not eternal, the Sages did not use the word *chazir*, which alludes to the pig one day being kosher. Thus, they can avoid having simple people think too much about this teaching. According to these reasons, it is only the Hebrew word for pig that should be avoided. Finally, in *Nefesh Chaya* to *Orach Chaim* 156:16, R. Reuven Margolios writes, after quoting the Tishbi, that the real reason that we do not say the name of the *chazir* is that it is a disgusting animal, and we find it vile. This would then apply to any language. (One must, however, reconcile the approach of the *Nefesh Chaya* with the statement of our Sages in Sifra, Kedoshim, 9: “A person should not say, ‘I have no desire to eat pig,’ but rather, ‘I certainly do, but what am I to do, for my Father in Heaven forbade it to me.’”) It should also be noted that the Talmud often uses the word *chazir*, and the Aramaic variant, *chazira*, and thus, we can conclude that there is no actual prohibition at all to say the word “pig.” Nevertheless, the sensitivities expressed by our Sages are ones that we should imbibe.

4 Shabbos 129b; see Rashi, s.v. *kasheh*

5 *Orach Chaim* 173

come down with ‘that other thing,’ *tzaraas*.” Why on earth should this be? The first thing that must be understood properly is why not to eat meat and fish together. Should we discover the reason for this, we will then be better equipped to understand why it brings *tzaraas* upon the eater. R. Shimon Pollack, in his *responsa*, *Shem Mishimon*,⁶ explains that there is quite a deep reason that fish and meat must remain separate. You see, the Kabbalistic works⁷ are replete with the notion that the very righteous people, real Tzaddikim, are often sent back to this world reincarnated as fish.⁸ The wicked, however, come back to this world as livestock:⁹ cows, sheep, goats and the like. Therefore, explains R. Pollack, one is not to eat meat and fish together, for that would mix the unrighteous with the righteous, and even in their death, they are to be separated, and the distinction between how they lived their lives is to be made. Just as we do not bury the wicked and the righteous together,¹⁰ so do we not “eat them” together.

We also must understand a bit more about *tzaraas*. *Tzaraas* would seem to be about boundaries.¹¹ When a person mixes things up that are meant to remain separate, *tzaraas* comes. *Tzaraas* comes to the person who has intimate relations with one who he is not meant to.¹² In fact, there are seventy-two types of *tzaraas*, which is the very *gematria* of the word *chesed*, the word used in the Torah¹³ to describe the most illicit of relationships.¹⁴ When a person speaks about another Jewish person in a negative way, what he is actually doing is changing the way that we see that person. Until now, we saw him as righteous, and now, we do not, and may never again, see him as we did before. The solution for the person who does not carefully

6 Yoreh Deah 13, at the end.

7 Arizal in *Shaar Hagilgulim*, *bakdama* 4; Rema MiFano in *Kanfei Yona* 2, 104. See also *Kitzur Shelah*, “Hanhagas Shabbos,” p. 161, regarding eating fish on Shabbos, and *Bnei Yissaschar*, “Sivan,” 5, as well as *Ohr Hachaim* to Bereishis 1:26. See also *Emek Hamelech*, *shaar Tikkunei Tshuva* 4, and *shaar* 16 29, and 45. See also *Nachalas Binyamin* (mitzvah 116, 14) quoted in *Amudei Chaim* of R. Chaim Palagi (*amud Avoda* 25, p. 334, Shuvi Nafshi ed.), where he writes that the souls of the righteous come back reincarnated as fish, which, to be eaten, need only to be caught; mediocre people come back as birds, which need only one *siman* to be cut for them to be considered slaughtered and the wicked come back as animals, which require both *simanim* to be cut in order to be slaughtered. He explains that this is why fish are not brought as sacrifices; they do not need that sort of rectification.

8 See, however, R. Chaim Palagi’s *Amudei Chaim*, *ibid.*, where he quotes the Shem Shmuel (“Kovetz Katan,” p. 28, column 3), that there is no reincarnation from human to fish. He then quotes a story with the Baal Shem Tov that indicates that there is, in fact, reincarnation to fish, as well as the Yalkut Reuveni (Veeschanan 130), and then suggests that perhaps one source is talking about *nitzotz*, and one about *gilgul* (two terms that, in English, would both fall under the umbrella term, “reincarnation”; see *Likkutei Torah* of the Arizal to Vayelech.)

9 *Shaar Hagilgulim*, *bakdama* 22, *Shiur Komah*, Inyan Gilgul, 4.

10 Sanhedrin 47a; *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 362:5

11 See Maharal’s *Chiddushei Aggados* to Sanhedrin 101b, s.v. *sheparcha*, where he says this. Note also that David was punished with *tzaraas* for his actions with Batsheva, and his lack of proper boundaries there. Maharal explains that *tzaraas* and kingship are connected in that both are the epitome of separation from other – only, at opposite extremes. It is, therefore, noteworthy that David’s relationship with Batsheva, while bringing him *tzaraas*, also brought him the son Shlomo, who would be the true king to come from him, and continue his dynasty.

12 Arachin 16a

13 Vayikra 20:17. See also *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:53.

14 *Shem Mishmuel*, Shemos 676

define things, and blurs distinctions, is to send him out of the camp.¹⁵ He is made distinct. He is separated from everything, and hopefully, he will get the clarity that he needs. Ben Sira¹⁶ wrote, “A wicked wife is like *tzaraas* in one’s home. What is the solution – divorce her¹⁷ from his home.” The solution for *tzaraas* is separation. For the person who is connecting to a woman

15 Vaykira 13:46

16 Book of *Ben Sira*, quoted in Sanhedrin 100b. Ben Sira, according to the apocryphal *Aggadas Ben Sira*, was the child of Yirmiyahu the prophet from his own daughter, for she conceived Ben Sira when she was in the tub, and was unknowingly impregnated by her father’s seed that he had emitted unknowingly into that very same tub earlier. “Sira” in *gematria* is 271, as is “Yirmiyahu,” and they called him the son of Sira rather than the son of Yirmiyahu, to avoid the embarrassment that this might cause. *Tashbetz* (vol. 3, 263) already questions the validity of this account when dealing with the story, by simply adding the phrase, “if we are to trust outside sources.” Bach, in his commentary to *Yoreh Deah* 195:5, writes that he discovered in a book of Rabbenu Peretz, a Tosafist, that the author uses this story to prove that as long as there was no illicit cohabitation, the child is entirely considered a legitimate child, even if the biological parents were forbidden to one another. See also *Mishneh Limelech*, “*Isbus*,” 15:4. See also *Likkutei Maharil* 3, where he writes that initially, Ben Sira was referred to as Ben Zera, but after he suffered humiliation from this name, it was altered. See also *Chelkas Michokek* to *Even Haezer* 1:8. R. Shlomo Zalman Aurbach (*Minchas Shlomo* vols. 2–3, 124) writes that we can not rely upon the work *Aggadas Ben Sira*, for it is of dubious authorship; yet, he does not dismiss the opinion of Rabbenu Peretz as a legitimate one. However, he, himself, ultimately rules that a child is illegitimate solely based upon who the biological parents are, even if there was no physical relationship. The Talmud, in Sanhedrin 100b, forbids one to read the book of *Ben Sira*. Ritva to Bava Basra 98b, s.v. *kasuv*, and *Nimukei Yosef*, ad loc., write that despite the fact that the Sages did not want one to read *Ben Sira*, they only meant that one is not to make it a serious and permanent study; but it is certainly appropriate to glean the wisdom that is there, whereas this is not true about the books of *minim* (heretics). See, however, Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:1, where the book of *Ben Sira* is equated with *sefarim chitzonim*, about which the Mishnah writes that one who reads them loses his portion in the World to Come. The Rif similarly says that *Ben Sira* is just like the books of *minim*, and the Rosh says they are like those of *tzedukim* (Saducees), both of which cause one to lose his portion in the World to Come. See the surprise of *Pilpula Charifta* (6) there. See also *Shaalos Uteshuvos Divrei Yetziv* (*Yoreh Deah*, 141) where he writes that despite the fact that the Talmud quotes it, once they declared that one was not to read it, and they buried it, it became forbidden to teach it at all. See also the note of Radal to *Kobeles Rabbah* 12, on the verse “*Asos sefarim barbech en ketz*,” where he distinguishes between the work of *Ben Sira* and the works of Homer. Interesting also is the fact that the Gemara, in Sanhedrin 100b, writes that *Ben Sira* is avoided because there are some patently absurd statements in there. An example is given of one of these sections. Fascinatingly, that very section is expounded at great length in the *Tikkunei Zohar Chadash* 132b. Chida, in his *Pesach Einayim* to Sanhedrin there, s.v. *ela mishum* quotes the great R. Nissim Hacohen as having asked this question, and suggests that perhaps they chose to forbid *Ben Sira* because it contains such lofty secrets, which, in those days, were extremely hidden and not for the masses, thus, would have caused many people to see those words as bizarre. See also the work *Miorei Ohr* of R. Aaron Worms (successor of the Shaagas Aryeh in the city of Metz), where he concludes that since the *Zohar* brings this, “we can conclude, as we have suggested, that the Sages only wanted to distance people from frittering away their time, attempting to decipher riddles.”

17 See *Ben Yeboyada* to Sanhedrin, ad loc., who understands that this does not mean divorce, but rather a temporary separation. See also Shaalos Uteshuvos Chachmei Provincia, where they explain that this Gemara does mean to divorce the wife. However, they explain that one is not meant to do so if he has children from that wife, and he should stay married unless there was infidelity on the part of his wife, as in Gittin 90a. This is an important source regarding divorce when there are children involved! See also the essay of R. Avraham Palagi printed in his father R. Chaim Palagi’s *Lichaim BiYerushalayim* to Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 6:4, section 5, where he explains that although one must divorce his wife if he completely trusts a single witness to her infidelity, he is not allowed to do so if they have children together, for this would then imply that those children may have been conceived illegitimately, and he would be effectively spreading false rumors about them. R. Palagi brings numerous proofs to this there.

that is wicked, and he ought not to, separation is the only solution.

Perhaps this would also explain why it is that converts to Judaism who do not fulfill what the Torah demands of them are also compared to *tzaraas*.¹⁸

With this in mind, perhaps we can begin to understand why eating meat and fish together would bring *tzaraas* on a person. Since eating meat and fish is, as we have learned, a blurring of the distinctions between righteous and wicked, it therefore brings *tzaraas*. In fact, this also helps us understand why it is that pig is associated with *tzaraas*. Our Sages teach us that the pig pretends to be kosher. He sticks out his cloven hooves, which are one of the two kosher signs,¹⁹ as if to say, “Look at me, I am kosher!”²⁰ Esav, and his descendants, the Romans, famously claimed to be the real Jews. They are compared by our Sages to the pig.²¹ “We are Israel,” say other religions who claim to have replaced the chosen nation. In fact, the very name *chazir* means “return,”²² for he is trying to convince us that he chews his cud, and returns his food to his mouth as a kosher animal does. His very name is one of deception.²³ Thus, the pig, the animal that blurs the distinction between kosher and non-kosher, and between Jew and Gentile, takes ninety percent of the *tzaraas* that comes to this world.

We can bring *tzaraas* into our lives when we do not know the place of things. When we speak of something, but that is not how it is, or we connect to things that we should not. The Torah tells us that to solve our problem of *tzaraas*, the solution is to step out of our homes for a bit. We often need to take a step back and gain some perspective. Then, we can all know where things fit, and most importantly, where we are to fit as well.

18 Kiddushin 70b; see Rashi, s.v. *kashin*, and Tosafos, s.v. *kashim*. There it says that “*geirim* are as hard for Israel as a *Sapachas* [one type of *tzaraas*].” See Rambam’s *Issurei Biah* 13:18, where he rephrases this as “*geirim* are as hard for Israel as the affliction of *tzaraas*.”

19 Vayikra 11:3; see Chida’s *Nachal Kedumin* there, where he quotes Rabbenu Efraim (one of the Tosafists) explaining that the kosher animals regurgitate their food and eat it more than once, just as the Jew eats the fruits of his good deeds both in this world and the next.

20 Berehesis Rabbah 65:1; Rashi Bereishis 36:24. See also Chasam Sofer to Vayishlach, s.v. *viraisi*, where he explains this idea further, as well as *Kli Yakar* to Vayikra 11:4.

21 Vayikra Rabbah 13:5

22 See Radak in his *Sefer Hashborashim* (s.v. *ches*, *zayin*, *resh*) that the mishnaic word for “return,” *chazarah*, is based upon the biblical word for “pig.” Ibn Janasch, in his *Sefer Hashborashim*, also lists the animal *chazir* as the only instance of that root in Tanach.

23 See the comments of R. Moshe Blau, quoted above, regarding why we call the pig a *davar acher*. Since his name is one of deception, we refer to him as something other than he really is in order that we not be duped.