

## Parshat Metzora 5776

When "normal" medical issues arise, we tend (quite correctly) to run to the doctor; but give insufficient thought to the overarching Power governing our world. Habituation leads to insensitivity.

In contrast, where the origin is entirely spiritual, and no "natural" cause-and-effect relationship can be perceived, the impact is entirely different. The classic case of "inexplicable" physical symptoms is Tzora'as. Our Sedra addresses Tzora'as of houses (which follows on from last week's introduction of Tzora'as on the both the body and clothing). What accentuates the impact is: the order of the events; the "purification/correction" rules to be followed; and the shattering publicity of the aveiros (which the culprit may have tried to conceal).

Tzora'as was a punishment for a list of seven offences (found in Arachim 16a) most notably loшон horoh; but including arrogance and stinginess. Once the signs become visible, they might disappear, reappear, weaken, remain unchanged or spread and worsen. All turned on the teshuva of the perpetrator. A spiritual failure required the individual to take a spiritual journey to remedy it.

**Emptying the house:** As soon as the walls of the house exhibited the appearance of tzora'as; even before the Cohen (who was to make the determination) had visited to adjudge whether or not the house must be quarantined, all the owner's possessions were to be taken out. This was to prevent them from becoming tamay. Everything concealed within the privacy of one's home, was now on public view, so the person who refused a request to lend out his tools (or other items), claiming they were not available, was exposed.

**Party walls** If the Cohen found signs of Tzora'as in the walls, he quarantined the house for a week. If on his return the discolouration had spread, the affected stones had to be removed and the plaster scraped off and taken away. The Torah (perek 14; 40/41) uses the plural "They..." rather than the singular "He shall remove the stones". Chazal interpret this to include the neighbour from the adjoining house. He also has to participate in removing the stones. The Midrash in Toras Cohanim sites this as a source for the expression "Woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbour."

From here we see a vital element in community life. An "observant" Jew notices his neighbour, assists him when in trouble and by his involvement, hopefully, avoids situations which deteriorate to the stage where loшон horoh is spread.

**The order:** Sefer Hachinuch (mitzvah 177) quotes the Rambam (Hilchos Tumas Tzora'as 16;10) setting out tzora'as becoming manifest in the reverse order. First the house was discoloured, then the clothes, and finally the individual was afflicted. The shame of exposing his possessions and potentially having his home destroyed was directed at achieving teshuva. If he failed to learn the lesson, his status in the community was downgraded – for clothing confers dignity. Persistent failure led to bodily symptoms which resulted in the individual becoming an outcast. At this stage he would have no one

to who he could now speak loшон horoh, so the punishment was carefully targeted at correcting the error.

In Sedra Eikev we read "Ki Ka'asher Ye'Yaser ish es b'no, HaShem Elokehah M'Yasrecho" – for just as a man trains his son, HaShem your G-d will train you. Punishment is not an end in itself; correction to walk in HaShem's ways is always the ultimate objective.

**Hidden treasure:** Tzora'as of houses appears to be a punishment. Amazingly, Rashi presents it as good tidings. He says the Amorites hid gold in the walls of their homes for safety while B'nei Yisrael were in the midbar. When the houses were demolished the treasures were found. What kind of "punishment" was this? Such are the mysteries of Divine Providence. A penalty may merit mitigation in particular circumstances. We have a tradition that at times of catastrophe HaShem has already planted the seeds of redemption.

**Pesach connections:** The order (house, then clothes, then the individual) mirrors Rabbi Yehuda's mnemonic for the plagues DeTzach Adash V'Ahav. The groups of Makos were first near, then very close, and finally on the very body of those afflicted. The build up created an additional pressure.

Just as the devastating impact of tzora'at was a call to the culprit, and all those who observed his calamity, to "sit up and take notice"; so (but in a different way) is the fundamental change to our households, our diet and the enormous impact of the Yom Tov of Pesach on our sensitivities also a time to sit up and take notice.

Build up can be either negative or positive. A part of the impression of Shabbos HaGodol (and its lead up to Pesach) is not the sudden change. It is the growth, season by season, month by month, and week by week to bring ourselves to this special time. It is this constant activity (learning Torah, growing in Mitzvah observance, and careful preparation) that can transform our personality.

**Hakoros HaTov:** On this Shabbos, the last Shabbos where we have the privilege of Bobby Hill's weekly shiur after the HaShkama minyan, it is particularly appropriate to express our hakoras hatov. Bobby has for 20+ years given over his carefully prepared and researched Rambam expositions – in addition to many other shiurim at other times to the whole community. Both what he has taught and the example he has set, have had a significant impact on our lives and those of our families. May all that we have learned from Bobby be a zechus for him and his family, and may our future thirst to embellish our learning – led by the Rav and so encouraged by Bobby – be met with its due reward.