



Tazriah Metzorah: Lesion Lessons

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In this week's Parsha we are introduced to the *Metzorah*. A person afflicted with some type of skin lesion or discoloration. However, this was no ordinary dermatological issue; *tzaraas* was a physical manifestation of a spiritual malady. The Talmud explains that *tzaraas* was a punishment for those who spoke *lashon hara* (slander about another). *"Just as the slanderer creates distance between people, so too is he distanced from the community (by forcing him to live in isolation for the duration of his illness)."* The *Metzorah* was not only banished but he was deemed *tamei* (ritually impure). The obvious lesson of *tzaraas* is the destructive nature of *lashon hara*. Words hurt. Words can maim, injure and even kill. But I would like to share two additional life lessons to be gleaned from the *Metzorah* and his ailment.

Lesson #1 – Your actions create your identity. The classic commentaries discuss the psychology of sin. Why would a person sin knowing the ramifications of such deleterious behavior? No matter what perceived benefit I may receive from the sinful act, the negative results and repercussions far outweigh the gain. Yet, we continue to sin. Perhaps, we justify our behaviors because we feel we can engage in negative actions while still remaining whole people. We try to convince ourselves that we can do certain things, but it won't have an impact on who we are. We all want to be good, upstanding and even righteous people. As a result, we tell ourselves that my identity will remain intact even if I push the limits of correct behavior. Unfortunately, we know (at least deep down) that this is false. Who we are is a composite of what we do. Our identity is a composite of our actions. If I act a certain way, I become a certain kind of person. This is why the *Metzorah* is not simply banished, he is impure. This impurity reminds us that our actions change us. However, we must remember that the same way sin defiles the *Metzorah*, positive, dynamic and righteous activity creates holy identity. Our actions create our core sense of self. What you do determines who you are.

Lesson #2 – There is a time and place for everything. The *Kohen* is the only individual who can rule on *tzaraas*; only he has the power to declare the lesion pure or impure. Yet Rashi (13:14) explains that there are certain times that the *Kohen* will send a suspected *Metzorah* home and tell him to come back another time.

"...there is a day on which you [the Kohen] look [i.e., examine the suspected lesion], and there is a day on which you do not look [i.e., when he may not examine it]. From here [our Rabbis] say that a bridegroom is exempt [from having a lesion examined] throughout all the seven days of the wedding feast, for himself, his garments, and his house. Similarly, during a Festival [people] are exempt [from having a lesion examined] throughout all the days of the Festival." (Torath Kohanim 13:87)

But if *Tzaraas* is so severe how can we send the groom back to his bride? Or the pilgrim back to his family? The pilgrim must be attentive to his time in the holy Temple in Jerusalem. For the groom - the most important thing is that he focus on his new wife. When *Sheva Berachos* conclude, the groom will have to come back and present his lesion to the *Kohen*. There is a time and place for everything. Successful living requires the cultivation of a deep reservoir of patience. Many times in life there are things we want to accomplish or realities we desire to see actualized and we grow frustrated when things don't happen as quickly or expeditiously as we had hoped. Sometimes, our dreams don't materialize at the desired time because we didn't try hard enough and sometimes, it is simply because Hashem is saying: *it's not the right time*. But there is something deeper. When we say "it isn't the right time" it conjures up an image of "waiting" for the right time. The Jew never waits. If it isn't the right time for one initiative, it means that it is time to work on something else. If it isn't time for the groom to have his lesion examined, that is because it is time for him to work on his marriage. There is a time and place for everything – but we must never simply wait for something.

Although, we no longer have *Tzaraas*, the lessons, the meaning and the importance of this concept shapes our lives to this very day.