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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT TAZRIA**

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**This year's Parashat HaShavua series is dedicated  
in loving memory of Dov Ber ben Yitzchak Sank z"l**

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**Taharat HaMetzora  
by Rav Ezra Bick**

Parashat Tazria, like Parashat Metzora, which follows it, deals exclusively with tum'a and tahara. Specifically, the five kinds of tum'a described in these two parshiot, yoledet, metzora, zav, zava, and nida, form a subset of tum'a known in the halakha as "tum'ot hayotzot migufo" (the source of tum'a is the body of the tamei; i.e., he or she is not tamei by coming in contact with something else, but as a result of a body condition). These tum'ot are set off from other tum'ot (contact tum'ot) in the Torah. The most prominent of tum'ot - tum'at met (contact with a dead body) is found only in Bemidbar (parashat Chukat), and even neveila and sheretz, which are contiguous to our present parshiot (parashat Shemini) are appended to the discussion of the prohibition of EATING certain species. It is, of course, true that the forbidden species are themselves described as "tmei'im," so that it is indeed fair to say that we are in the middle of a section of "tum'a;" however, there is a difference between a beheima tmei'a which is prohibited and the halakhic concept of tum'a described in our parshiot. I shall not discuss what is the common concept to prohibited food and objects which "contaminate," but no matter what that common point is, there is still an important legal distinction between the two. The Torah itself sets off the discussion in these two parshiot from that in Shemini, with a five verse conclusion to Shemini (11,43-47), stressing the theme of "kedusha" and "havdala," aside from "tum'a and tahara," and finishing with the coda formula of "zot torat habeheima ve-ha'of..." Tazria begins with a new "vayedaber HaShem el Moshe leimor" and "daber el bnei yisrael leimor," with a separate "zot torat..." for yoledet (12,7), metzora (13,59), the purification of the metzora (14,54-57), and the three emission tum'ot (15,3233).

Due to our distance from practical dealing with the subject, it is difficult for us to understand what tum'a is. I shall try today to examine the concept as an autonomous one; that is, not by equating it with some other concept (sin, etc.), but by trying to understand what the Torah says about it. For this purpose, we shall primarily utilize metzora, who takes up not only the bulk of our parasha, but occupies an extreme position within the family of tmei'im, and is therefore perhaps a clearer indication of the internal meaning of tamei.

First, what does the status "tamei" imply? In parashat Shemini, regarding the contact tum'ot of neveila and sheretz, the Torah simply stated that one is tamei. However, in Tazria, immediately after introducing tum'at yoledet, the Torah stated the implications - "She shall not touch any sacred thing, nor come into the sacred place (mikdash)" (12,4). This is the main ramification of tum'a - one who is tamei is removed from the sacred provinces and prohibited to come into contact with sacred objects.

Tum'a is an obstacle to kedusha. Removal from the mikdash is, halakhically, a graded system dependent on the

severity of the tum'a, based on the verse in Sefer Bemidbar (5,1-4), which lists metzora, zav, and tmei met. Metzora is the most severe, and his removal is not only from "machaneh shechina" (the inner azara), like tmei met; and not only from "machaneh levia" (the entire temple confines, har habayit), like zav, zava, nida, and yoledet; but even from "machaneh yisrael" (the encampment in the desert, Yerushalayim in Eretz Yisrael). In other words, the verse in Tazria (13,45-46), "And the tzaruah who has the sore... he shall live in solitude, outside of the encampment shall be his dwelling," is understood by the halakha (in light of the verses in Bemidbar) to be an extension of the "nor come into any sacred place" imposed on the yoledet. The machaneh Yisrael is also a "sacred place," albeit on a lesser level. The metzora is on the most severe level of tum'a, if tum'a is understood as alienation from sanctity; he must dwell the farthest from the center of sanctity of all tmei'im, and is not even allowed to enter the sacred province of the camp of Israel. This is reiterated at the end of the parasha - "You shall separate Bnei Yisrael from their defilement; and they shall not die from their defilement, by defiling My dwelling which is in their midst" (15,31). The fact that the dwelling of God is in the midst of the Jews makes the presence of tum'a a dangerous situation. The entire camp of the Jews is the surrounding of the dwelling of God, which is in "their midst."

This gives us the basic ingredient in understanding what is tum'a of a person. Tum'a is a state which interferes and prevents the relationship of a man with the sacred, with kedusha. At the strongest level, it prevents the integration of the tamei with the sacred community of Israel, on a less severe level it obstructs his entrance into the realm of God's service, on the weakest level, it interferes with his coming into the presence of God. In last week's shiur, this state was explained in relation to death, taking "met" as the standard of tum'a. Death is the opposite of relationship to the source of life, growth, and kedusha. Today, we shall try to see what can be derived from metzora, rather than met. We shall concentrate on the purification ceremony of the metzora, which is much more complicated than that for any other tamei (including tmei met, parashat Chukat). My assumption will be that by seeing what a metzora must undergo to remove his status as tamei we will achieve an understanding of what it is that he is removing.

The purification of a metzora (Parashat Metzora, ch. 14) has a number of distinct elements, reminiscent of other procedures.

1. Two birds (kappara)

Two birds are taken, one of which is slaughtered and one freed "over the face of the field" (14,7). This is strikingly similar to the two goats of Yom Kippur (Vayikra 16).

"The kohen shall command and TAKE for the purificant TWO LIVE PURE BIRDS... and the kohen shall command and SLAUGHTER THE FIRST BIRD... and he shall SPRINKLE on the purificant from tzara'at SEVEN TIMES, and purify him, and he shall SEND THE LIVE BIRD ON THE FACE OF THE FIELD" (14,4-7).

"From the congregation of Bnei Yisrael, he shall TAKE TWO GOATS as a sin-offering... and Aharon shall SACRIFICE THE GOAT on which the lot 'To God' fell... and SPRINKLE (its blood) on the kapporet and before the kapporet (SEVEN TIMES)... And Aharon shall

press his two hands on the head of the live goat... and SEND it with a ready man TO THE DESERT" (16,5-21).

The most striking parallels here are two which are unique; first, the pairing of two animals which are then separated to life and to death, and secondly, the freeing of an animal rather than sacrificing it. The first is halakhically stressed by a requirement that the two birds of metzora and the two goats of Yom Kippur be twin-like - identical in size and appearance, and that they are to be brought as a pair (See Rambam, Hilkhos Tum'at Tzara'at 11,8; Hilkhos Avodat Yom Hakippurim 5,14. The language is identical in both cases). The second is strengthened by the identical verb - "ve-shilach." The Ramban (14,4; at the end) comments, "The reason (for the sending of the bird) is like the secret of the sa'ir hamishtale'ach (scapegoat); there it is sent to azazel in the desert, and here to flight in the field."

The meaning of the scapegoat on Yom Kippur is a very difficult topic, as the Ramban hints by using the word "secret (sod)." Nevertheless, it is clear that it is a process of kappara (atonement). If atonement is part of the process of the return of the metzora, it is clear that there is something for which he must atone. Being a metzora is a state that requires atonement. The obvious candidate for atonement is sin, and in Yom Kippur that is clear (16,22 - "and the goat shall carry all their sin to an uninhabited land"). That is why there is a confession of the kohen gadol over the goat. In the case of the metzora, there is no obvious sin, and the Torah does not mention any such sin, nor is there confession or semikha (pressing of hands). The bird itself is not a chatat (sin-offering). Looking back to yoledet at the beginning of Tazria, we see that there too (12,7-8) the Torah spoke of "atonement and purification." In fact, all the tmei'im of these two parshiot (tum'ot hayotzot migufot) require kappara; in each case, it is written "vekippeir - vetaheir" (14,20; 14,53; 15,15; 15,30).

The Ramban identifies three distinct mentions of kappara in the case of the metzora, and comments (14,18):

We do not understand what all these kapparot are for. Perhaps the asham will atone for the sin he committed before he became a metzora; and the chatat for the sin he committed while he was a metzora, if perhaps he blasphemed against God in his grief; and the ola and mincha will be a soul-redemption (KOFER nefesh) that he should merit purity and return to his tent.

The lack of any EXPLICIT mention of sin in connection with metzora leads me to adopt the last suggestion of the Ramban as the pshat here. The basic meaning of kappara is not forgiveness of sin but redemption from a state that needs redemption. In our case, it is the estrangement described above (which the Ramban hints at by writing that the 'kofer' will lead to his return to his tent). Tum'a, at least tum'a that originates in the man's body itself, is a state that is akin to sin, or to enslavement, which needs to be redeemed. One has been dragged down by forces inimical to kedusha. Kappara replaces the old state with a new one.

The particular meaning of "sending" an animal to redeem, rather than the normal sacrifice, is, I think, that in the normal case, by giving something to God, one redeems oneself. The gift atones for and frees the person from guilt. In more severe cases, what is present in the man's inner state contains an element that can not be redeemed in itself, it is beyond redemption. It must be sent away, unredeemed, so that what remains can be redeemed. In the case of Yom Kippur, the Torah says explicitly that the sins are carried away by the goat. The Ramban suggests here as well that the bird carries away the tum'a to the field. Only by sending part of the personality away, by severing the corrupted part, can the rest be healed.

## 2. Live water and sprinkling (tahara)

The BLOOD of the slaughtered bird is added to "MAYIM CHAYIM" (spring water), then cedar wood (ETZ EREZ), scarlet (SHNI TOLA'AT), and hyssop (EIZOV) (together with the live bird), are dipped in and the kohen sprinkles ("VE-HIZA") it seven times on the purificant.

This obviously parallels the preparation of the para aduma, used to purify a tmei met. There, the ASHES of the para aduma, burnt together with ETZ EREZ, SHNI TOLA'AT, AND EIZOV, are added to MAYIM CHAYIM, and sprinkled on the tamei (Bemidbar 19). The outcome of the para aduma ceremony is "tahara."

Hazaya (sprinkling), as opposed to immersion in a mikva, is called "chitui" by the Torah (Bemidbar 19,12; 13; 19; 20 - yitchatta, chitei). The verb is used in modern Hebrew to mean "to disinfect," which, I think, is not far off - it means to cleanse. ("lachato" [to sin] means to go astray, to miss the mark. One whose aim is bad has "chata" the target. "Lichatei" [in pi'el] means to pull something off target, meaning to remove a spot from where it is already). Immersion in a mikva also symbolizes cleanliness, but without any effort - a person coming out of the mikva has been renewed, returned, as it were, to an original state of cleanliness. (Jewish thought sees in the mikva a remembrance of the original waters that covered the world at creation, or, alternatively, of the waters of the womb). If the stain is a stubborn one, it needs to be ripped off, cleansed, with not only water but with special additives (soap, as it were) and a special agent (the kohen), and this is the purpose of haza'a. In any event, the outcome is (spiritual) cleanliness, a return to primordial pristine existence.

## 3. Ears, fingers, and toes (chinuch)

On the EIGHTH day of the purification of the metzora (after spending SEVEN days OUTSIDE HIS TENT), he brings a number of sacrifices (as do the zav, zava, nida, and yoledet). One of them is an asham. The kohen takes the blood of the asham, and places some on the right earlobe, right thumb, and right big toe of the metzora. He then does the same thing with oil (14,14-17). Finally, he places some oil on the metzora's head.

The same thing was done to the kohanim (Aharon and his sons) as part of the inauguration of the mishkan. During the SEVEN days of the milu'im, while Aharon and his sons stayed at the ENTRANCE TO THE TENT, the blood of the second ram was placed on their right earlobes, thumbs, and big toes, (Shemot 29,19-20; Vayikra 8,22-24 they were also anointed with oil). This ceremony is so unusual, that the similarity is all the more striking. As before, we do not have to have a theory of the meaning of the details of this ceremony to understand the context. The kohanim are being inducted into the service of God. The (holy) oil on their heads is a classic inauguration ritual (as was done for kings), and apparently, the blood on their right limbs has similar significance. The entire seven day period is the inauguration procedure of the kohanim, called milu'im (to fill - to fill them with new content), or, chinuch (dedication, as in chanukat hamizbeach).

Now the kohanim are embarking on a totally new role, separate from that of other Jews. The need to be appointed and prepared for this task. The metzora, though, is returning to his normal state. Apparently, being a normal Jew, after the state of tum'a, requires renewal of a dedication of the person. Again, in the case of metzora, the corruption of tum'a is so great that the purification cannot take place without this element, whereas for other tmei'im, including the tum'ot hayotzot migufam, this result is achieved automatically. This nonetheless indicates the nature of tum'a in general though. The tamei has lost the personal status, or at least had it significantly impugned, that made him

worthy and capable of serving God (on the yisrael level, as a kohen does on the kohen level). While this status does not require a special ritual for normal Jews, once one has become tamei, at least on the most severe level, it requires a special ceremony to bring it back. The status of serving God is a special one, which does require a special preparation, even if in normal conditions it apparently is achieved through being born Jewish.

#### 4. Summation

We have identified three stages in the purification of a metzora: kappara, consisting of removing part of the personality and rejecting it, letting it fly away, as it were; tahara, cleansing of what remains, rejuvenating it; and chinuch, rededication to the service of God. Tum'a is a state which prevents life and interferes with the relationship with living things, whether other men or God.

I have tried to take a complicated and arcane ritual and make some sense out of it. I will be the first to admit that I have not explained ANY of the details themselves - finding parallels merely moves the question over to the next area. Why cedar wood, why right earlobes, why birds - I haven't even begun to answer these questions. What I have done is tried to understand the role these things play in the Torah, and this can be done by finding other places where they appear. To understand the meaning of each item, why they are appropriate to the role they play, one can look in any of the commentators or the midrashim, which are rich in explanations and ideas. (For instance, to start at the beginning, see Rashi 14,3, and especially the Ramban, for an explanation of the meaning of birds here. The Abrabanel has a detailed explanation of all the aspects of the ritual).

#### Points and questions:

1. One more ritual performed on the metzora was to shave off his body hair (14,8). The nearest parallel is the shaving of the Leviim (Bemidbar 8,7), though the language is not particularly similar. What function does this possibly serve?
2. Bemidbar 5,1-4 commands the exclusion of Tmei met, zav, and metzora from the "machaneh." From the verse, it is impossible to realize that in fact each of these tmei'im is excluded from a different machaneh, which serves to assimilate all three cases into one. Tmei'im in general are excluded. In parashat Tazria, there is a special command for the metzora to be "out of the machaneh;" the parallel command for yoledet speaks of not coming to the mikdash. Here (despite what I wrote in the shiur, which is correct in the final analysis), metzora is a different sort of exclusion than other tmei'im. How could this be explained?
3. The Ramban (14,4, towards the end) referring to the erez, eizov, and shni tola'at, writes, "The metzora, the house with a nega, and tmei met are similar, and all of them are after the pattern of Pesach Mitzrayim." The Ramban is referring to the fact that in Mitzrayim, the Jews placed the blood of the pesach on the doorposts with an eizov (Shemot 12,22 - but notice, no erez and no shni tola'at). What do you think is the connection that the Ramban sees?
4. In all the parallel cases we traced in the shiur, there are also differences (e.g., goats-birds, desert-field, ashes-blood, seven-eight, etc.). List them, and see if you can explain them.