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parashas tazria



If a person has upon his skin a white blotch, discoloration or spot and it is suspected of being a mark of the tzara'as affliction upon his skin, he shall be brought to Aharon Ha-Kohen, or one of his children the kohanim. (Vayikra 13:2)

THE KOHEN STUDIED Michah's arm with great seriousness, and said, "Tzara'as of the skin is evaluated on the basis of three symptoms, and any one of them indicates that the tzara'as is advanced. One is a discoloration of the hair in the affected area, from the natural color to white."¹

Michah looked at the white blotch on his arm. He felt VERY uneasy, even humiliated.

¹ The other two are 1.) skin of a normal appearance appears within the confines of the patch (Vayikra 13:10), and 2.) if the patch became enlarged since the time of the initial examination by the Kohen (Vayikra 13:7).

He had been warned. “You’re speaking loshon hara!”² his friend Osniel had told him, “and I want no part of it!”

But the yetzer hara is powerful, and in some people overwhelming. Michah had a difficult time controlling his tongue, and an even more difficult time admitting when he hadn’t.

“No I’m not!” he barked back. “I have a good REASON to say what I’m saying!”

“So did Miriam!” Osniel retorted, “and see what happened to her! White as snow!³ We’re not told to remember what happened to her for no reason!”

Michah scrunched his face, recalling the episode with Moshe’s sister, but still reluctant to give in.

“And you can’t get much more l’Shem Shamayim⁴ than Moshe Rabbeinu!” Osniel continued. “He also was given tzara’as for what he said about the Jewish people!”⁵

Now Michah looked away, defiant. He had a difficult time admitting he was wrong, his own undoing. There would come a time in history after the temples had been destroyed, and the Jewish people were exiled to distant lands, when a person could delude themselves as Michah now did. Divine Providence would become covert, making it possible for people to miss the Divine point of their suffering.⁶

“Hmm,” the kohen said, having difficulty finding enough signs to confirm that Michah indeed had tzara’as.

“What do you think?” Michah asked, a slight tremble in his voice, clearly humbled by the incident.

“Well,” the kohen explained, “had your lesion met the criteria of tzara’as, I would have had to declare you tamei right now.⁷ But it

² The cause of tzara’as (Arachin 16b).

³ Bamidbar 12:10.

⁴ For the sake of Heaven.

⁵ “...His hand was leprous like snow”: It is usual for tzara’as to be white [as we find:] “If it be a white blemish, etc.” (Vayikra 13:4). With this sign, too, He hinted to him that he spoke slanderously when he said, “They will not believe me.” It is for this reason that He struck him with tzara’as, just as Miriam was struck for speaking slanderously.

⁶ Devarim 31:17-18.

⁷ Ritually impure.

doesn't..."

"So I'm okay?" a prematurely excited Michah asked.

"Not really," the kohen answered him. "I have to confine you to your home for seven days..."

"You mean I can't go out of my house for SEVEN days?"

"That's right," the kohen answered him, "or have visitors."

"Ouch!" Michah said, considering all the ramifications of his new status.

"It hurts, doesn't it?" the kohen asked him.

"It certainly does!" Michah answered.

"Well, imagine the impact of your loshon hara on the person you spoke about...and in the spiritual realms above!"

Michah could only look at the ground and feel a sense of shame. "You can fool some of the people some of the time," he thought to himself, "but God NONE of the time!" as his tzara'as made eminently clear.

The kohen could see that Michah was finally getting it. "I'll be back in seven days to check on you again...to see if you actually have tzara'as."

"What will you be looking for?"

"For one, to see if it spread in the meantime."

"And if it hasn't?" Michah asked, a little hopeful.

"Well," the kohen answered him. "There is a difference in protocol depending of the type of lesion. For example, for patches of the skin, another confinement period of seven days is necessary."

"ANOTHER SEVEN DAYS?!"

"That's right," he said, "And for boils or burns, a kohen declares it merely a tzareves..."

"A tzareves?" Michah asked. "What's that?"

"It's a scar. If it's only a scar, then there are no further examinations, but for bald patches or lesions of the scalp or beard, another confinement period of seven days is also necessary. However prior to this second confinement period, the individual is shaved around the 'nesek,' leaving a rim of two hairs completely surrounding the bald spot to make any spreading visible."

Michah's face dropped with the thought of having to endure another seven days locked away in his house. He would be cut off from the world he loved to be a part of.

"After the second confinement period of seven days," the kohen continued, "both those with patches on the skin as well as those with bald patches are re-evaluated once more. If the criteria for tzara'as have still not been met, then the person is declared pure. All they have to do is wash their body and garments. Having been confined, they are considered to have been impure, in some sense."

Michah considered all that he heard. "That's a lot of details," he said to the kohen.

"More than you know and have discussed," he told Michah. "Tzara'as is serious business, because loshon hara is serious business."

Michah thought about his friend, Osniel's warning, and how he had downplayed it. Now he was paying the price. "What was I thinking?" he asked himself. "Why did I take the risk?"

"My work here is done," the kohen said. He gave Michah a few final instructions before leaving.

"Thank you for coming by," he said, contrite. "I promise I will try and control what I say for now on!"

The kohen smiled, and said. "That's good. But it's not me you have to make that promise to. It's God, and yourself."

"I suppose," he said.

The kohen left, and Michah closed the door on the world he would not be a part of for seven days. Would he ever live down the embarrassment? To take a step in the right direction, he took out a scroll of Tehillim his grandfather had left him, and began reciting. He prayed to God to help him in the future, every now and then looking at the blotch on his arm to see if it was gone to spare him any additional pain, and be the cause of more.

BOOK SHOWCASE

Insights from the Weekly Torah Reading in Discussion

A PICTURE IS still worth a 1,000 words, or something like that, and little paints a picture better than dialogue. This is the idea behind the “In Discussion” series of books on the weekly parsha.

To date, Bereishis, Shemos, and now Bamidbar, have been completed and are available in Softcover, Kindle, and PDF versions. Vayikra is in progress and, b”H, Devarim will be ready ahead of the time we read it.

Bereishis uses different stories and people to bring out and make real certain key points from each parsha. Shemos follows the departure from and return to Torah of a young man, and each parsha is key to his “awakening.” Bamidbar is the story of a boy on a quest to find his own way in Torah, and the weekly parshios are “camps” along his journey.

Learning is about a lot more than just hearing ideas. We have to experience them as well, and the more senses used in the learning process, the greater and more long-lasting the impact the material will have on us. “In Discussion” is meant to be more than just a LEARNING experience. It is also a LIVING experience, and judging from the feedback to date, b”H, readers have felt the same way.

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