

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXVII: Tazria (Lev. 12:1–13:59)

Essay 6. A metzora is like one who is dead

פסוק "אדם פייקה בעור-בשרו" וכו'. קשה שהרי מהמדרש הנ"ל נשקשהדם רבה על המים נעשה מצורע. נראה שהצרעת הוא חלי שבא מריבוי הדם, והדם אינו שרוי בעור אלא בתוך הגוף ולמה נקט דוקא "בעור-בשרו"?

There is a verse: **“When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of his body, he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests”** (Lev. 13:2). **A difficulty is that we find from the midrash mentioned above** in the previous essay, Lev. Rabbah 15:2, **that when a person’s blood is greater than the water within him, he will become a metzora.**^{1,2} **It appears that tzara’at is an illness that comes from too much blood, and the blood is not found in the skin, but rather within the body. Also, why does it specifically say** the apparently extraneous words, **“on the skin of his body”?**

ואגב ארחין נפרש מה שאמרו ז"ל מצורע חשוב כמת, ומלבד פי קרא כתיב "אל-נא תהי כמת". ועוד שהרי הוא מטמא באהל כמו המת, עוד אפשר לתת בו טעם לשבח לפי מה שכתב הטורף זקב בשולחן ערוך אורח חיים (סי"ו סעיף ה') ונ"ל, החובל במי שיש להם עור עד שנצטרך הדם חייב, דכיון שיש להם עור, העור מעכב הדם מלצאת, ואלמלא העור מעכבו הנה יוצא. ולפיכך חייב משום נטילת נשמה שבאותו מקום, "פי הדם הוא הנפש" עכ"ל.

By the way of different paths, we will explain what is said by [the rabbis] of blessed memory, “a metzora is considered as though dead,”³ besides what is written in Scripture, referring to Miriam when she was afflicted with tzara’at, “Let her not be as one dead” (Num.

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¹ A metzora is a person afflicted with a skin disease, tzara’at. Many English translations refer to the skin disease as leprosy and to the person afflicted as a leper. However, this skin disease was not related to leprosy. Rather, it was considered a physical manifestation of a spiritual ailment.

² Midrash Lev. Rabbah 15:2, “Man is evenly balanced: half of him is water, and the other half is blood. When he is deserving, the water does not exceed the blood, nor does the blood exceed the water. But when he sins, it sometimes happens that the water gains over the blood, and he then becomes a suffer from edema; at other times the blood gains over the water and he then becomes a metzora.”

³ Nedarim 64b: “It was taught [in a Baraita], Four are considered [as if they were] dead: A pauper, and a metzora, and a blind person, and one who has no children.” Also quoted at Avoda Zara 5a.

12:12). Furthermore, because [a *metzora*] can contaminate a tent,⁴ as can the dead,⁵ it is also possible to appreciate what is written by the Turei Zahav⁶ on the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim (316:5): **One who wounds someone on a Sabbath such that he has blood pooling under his skin is liable for having violated the Sabbath, since they have skin, and the skin prevents the blood from coming out; if not for the skin preventing [the blood], it would have come out. Therefore he is liable for having violated the Sabbath, because of taking a life in that place, “for the blood is the life” (Deut. 12:23).**

ולכן הואיל שהצרעת בא מריבוי דם שיש בגופו, ודאי אם לא הנה לו עור הנה יוצא, אלא שנוצר שם הדם "בעור-בשרו" והעלה אבעבועות ונעשה צרעת, וזהו שתשוב כמת, כי הדם שפירש מגופו ונקנס בעורו חשוב כמו נטילת נשמה.

Therefore, since *tzara'at* comes from an excess of blood in the body, it's certain that if there hadn't been skin, [the blood] would have exited. But the blood pools there “on the skin of his body” and raises boils and becomes *tzara'at*, and this [person] is considered as a dead [person], because the blood that is expelled from his body and that enters into his skin is considered as taking a life, just as with a person who wounds another on a Sabbath. Thus, we understand the inclusion in Scripture of the words, “the skin of his body,” as hinting that the excess blood pools under the skin and becomes like a wound, with an implication similar to that of a person who wounds another on a Sabbath. This understanding in light of the Turei Zahav is another reason for considering a *metzora* as like one who is dead.

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⁴ Mishnah Kelim 1:4, “Above the *zavah* is the *metzora*, for he conveys impurity by entering into a house.”

⁵ Num. 19:14-15: “This is the ritual: When a person dies in a tent, whoever enters the tent and whoever is in the tent shall be unclean seven days; and every open vessel, with no lid fastened down, shall be unclean.”

⁶ Rabbi David ha-Levi Segal (c. 1586–1667) (“the TaZ”), Polish rabbi and Talmudist, son-in-law of the Bach. He authored the Turei Zahav (Lublin 1646).