

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXVIII: Metzora (Lev. 14:1–15:33)

Essay 5. A righteous person should have a righteous neighbor

פסוק "מֵאֲרַת ה' בְּבֵית רָשָׁע וּנְוָה צְדִיקִים יִבְרָךְ". הַטַּעַם שֶׁאֲמַר רָשָׁע בְּלִשׁוֹן יְחִיד וְצְדִיקִים בְּלִשׁוֹן רַבִּים, וְהוּא הַפֶּה הַכָּתוּב "זָכַר צְדִיק לְבִרְכָה וְשֵׁם רָשָׁעִים יִרְקַב", דְּאֲמַרִּינן בְּפֶרֶק ג' דְּיוֹמָא צְדִיק מַעְצָמוּ וְרָשָׁע מִחֲבָרוּ.

There is a verse: **“The curse [*me'eirat*] [מֵאֲרַת] of the L-rd is on the house of the wicked one; but the abode of the righteous ones, He will bless”** (Prov. 3:33). **The sense is that it speaks about the wicked person in singular language, and the righteous people in the plural language.**

This is the opposite of the verse, “The name of the righteous one is invoked in blessing, but the fame of the wicked ones will rot” (Prov. 10:7). **As it says in the third chapter of tractate Yoma (38b), explaining Prov. 10:7, “Rabbi Elazar said: A righteous person [is praised] for his own [actions], and a wicked person [is cursed not only for his own actions but also for the actions] of his [wicked] counterpart.”** So why does Prov. 3:33 reverse this, and speak of the wicked in the singular form, and righteous in plural form?

ז'ש לומר דהאי מֵאֲרַת עֲנִינֵנוּ קָלִילָה נִגַּע וְצָרַעַת, כְּדִכְתִּיב "צָרַעַת מִמֵּאֲרַת".

It can be said that this curse [*me'eirat*] [מֵאֲרַת] of our subject is a curse of a plague and *tzara'at*,¹ as it is written, “a harmful [*mameret*] [מִמֵּאֲרַת] skin eruption.”² Ibn Ezra comments that the word *me'eirat* [מֵאֲרַת] is derived from the word *arur* [אָרוּר] [“a curse”], but Zera Shimshon is making a play on words, saying that *me'eirat* is connected with the word *mameret*, variously translated as “harmful,” “painful,” “persistent,” “malignant,” and used three times in conjunction with *tzara'at*.³

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¹ Many English translations refer to the skin disease *tzara'at* 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 Lev. 13:51, 13:52, 14:44.

³ Ibn Ezra did not connect the word *mameret* with *arur*, instead saying it is related to *mamir* [מִמַּיִר] [“prickling”].

ובנגעים נאמר אוי לרשע ואוי לשכנו, כי שניהם חולצין, שניהם קוצצין וכו'. ואם כן אם יהיה צדיק לבדו אין לו ברכה בשביל שהוא סמוך לרשע, אבל אם יהיו שני צדיקים סמוכים זה לזה אז "ויגה צדיקים יברך".

In Mishnah Negaim 12:6 it is said, “Woe to the wicked, woe to his neighbor, for both must take out [the stones], both must scrape [the walls], and both must bring the [new] stones.” If so, if a righteous person will be alone, there is no blessing for him, because he is living near a wicked person.

But if there would be two righteous people adjacent to each other, such that each had a righteous neighbor, instead of a wicked neighbor, then “the abode of the righteous ones, He will bless.”

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