

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

Tazri'a

A person with tzaraat - his garments must be rent and his hair shall be allowed to go wild... he shall dwell in isolation... outside the camp (13:46-48).

The Kli Yakar (on 13:2) divides the spiritual causes of tzaraat into three groups:

1. LASHON HARA - as with Miriam's report about Moshe's domestic life (Bamidbar 12:10).

2. GASUT RU'ACH - haughtiness of spirit - as with Naaman. "Naaman, the chief officer of the King of Aram was a great man before his master", (Melachim Bet 5:1) is understood by the Kli Yakar as to mean that he conducted himself in an arrogant manner.

3. CHEMDAT MAMON - jealous desire for money: Elisha had cured Naaman from tzaraat. Naaman offered Elisha payment, but he refused to accept. Gehazi, Elisha's student, chased after Naaman and took the payment for himself. He was punished with tzaraat (Melachim Bet 5:27).

Common to all groups is small-mindedness - as above. Such individuals feel ill-will towards the situation and possessions of others.

Yet in this and the following parsha, tzaraat is presented without any reference to spiritual cause, to why it befell the person in the first place. There is nothing about the sins committed that prompted the tzaraat to happen. The 106 p'sukim focus entirely on details, and details of details: symptoms of tzaraat on the individual and on property, where the kohen does and does not investigate, the metzora's isolation, and the requirements before the recovered metzora may return to society. They include special emphasis on the criteria that the kohen must apply in declaring whether the person is a metzora or not.

A simple explanation for this seeming omission is the focus of the Sefer in which it occurs: Sefer Vaykira, the sefer that also carries the name Torat Kohanim. Much of its content is about the special duties of the kohanim to the community that include examining and proclaiming status on who is and who is not a metzora. Why that particular person was stricken by tzaraat is not relevant to the kohen's duty.

However, a deeper explanation might be found in considering the nature of a fundamentally good person who has erred, and even seriously erred. It is important not to abandon him, but to be with him. Indeed, it is this, and the

next parsha that detail the required interactions with him, which do not include reminding him of his past failings. For the tzaraat itself amply communicates that he did wrong, and it's up to him to face the reality that in spiritual terms he didn't come up to the Torah's expectations. He doesn't need society or for that matter the kohen to tell him. He knows that. When he decides to abandon that behavior is his decision, and society can't make that decision for him.

But society can support the metzora even in his exclusion by showing that it is with him. For the Torah commands the kohen rather than an ordinary person to interact with him, and the kohen is within the social elite (c.f. D'varim 18:5). This implies a sense of being accepted even when excluded from society. A feeling of support and goodwill, not condemnation and ill-will. Which in itself may well nudge him to turn away from his former behavior without even mentioning it...  