

# The Metzora Mystery

Among the laws of *tzara'at*, there is one that stands out as most fascinating. If a person finds himself afflicted with *tzara'at* and is completely covered with white spots from head to toe, then he is rendered as *tahor*, pure. How is this possible? Doesn't the presence of blemishes demonstrate absolute impurity?

The Chafetz Chayim explains that in such a case this person is undoubtedly impure. Rather, the Torah is emphasizing that he need not go into isolation for the purpose of introspection. When there is only a small spot of *tzara'at*, one can convince himself that it appeared by chance and is not really a sign from Above.

In such a case, the one afflicted must be quarantined; he must take the time to introspect and see where he has veered from the correct path. However, when one is completely overspread by *tzara'at*, he is clearly aware that he has seriously sinned. The feeling of admission is itself part of the rectification.

Rav Dunner in *Mikdash Halevi* emphasizes another aspect that the Torah is teaching us here. When a person has a small *nega* he can easily hide it; his appearance to the outside world remains one of righteousness. The Chatam Sofer characterizes such a person as living a life of hypocrisy. This scenario is extremely dangerous since there is no indication of his misconduct and others can potentially be negatively influenced. However, one who is completely covered with white blotches is clearly marked as a transgressor. The *nega* is therefore *tahor* since he will be alienated automatically.



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The afflicted person himself is at the height of impurity.

The Admor M'gur learns a moral lesson from this *passuk*. Most often *tzara'at* comes as a punishment for speaking *lashon hara*. When one is completely covered with white marks it is a sign not that he said something wrong, rather he did not say something right when he could have. When a person misses an opportunity to say something positive, to complement or encourage another, Hashem shows him his error. He can therefore be covered in *tzara'at* yet be *tahor*.

Rav Pincus in *Tiferet Shimshon* recalls a fascinating insight that explains how it is possible for a person in this case to indeed be pure. When a person reaches a level of intense impurity at which he is entirely covered with *tzara'at*, Hashem has compassion and purifies him. We see a similar circumstance when *Am Yisrael* reached the 49<sup>th</sup> level of *tumah* in Mitzrayim, Hashem in His benevolence freed us from bondage. In a similar vein, the *halachah* states that when the Jews surround an enemy city in battle, they must leave one side open as a potential exit. If there would be no way for the enemy to escape, they would be totally oppressed and Hashem would have mercy on them, thus endangering the Jews' ability to win. Thus, we can understand the gemara in *Sanhedrin* that tells us *Mashiach* will come when all governments are completely heretical; when the world reaches this stage, Hashem will have mercy and will bring the Final Redemption. May it come speedily in our days. ■



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