



PORTION FROM

BY RAKEL BERENBAUM

Contributor, Torah Tidbits

THE PORTION

When You Come To The Land Of Canaan

In this double portion we learn the laws of *Tzara'at* – leprosy. There are three types of impurity- leprosy of the skin, clothes and of the house. These are what are referred to as *Negaim* which can be translated as lesions.

The wording related to *Tzara'at* of the house is the most unusual and raises numerous questions. The verses read “*Ki tavou el Eretz Canaan asher Ani Noten Lachem L'Achuza, Venatati...*when you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as an inheritance, I will place the mark of the leprous curse in houses in the land you inherit.” (14:34)

Doesn't this verse seem a bit strange? The people have been traveling through the desert, anticipating coming to the Promised Land and what does God tell them about the land? That He will place a cursed mark of leprosy on their homes there? It doesn't seem like the best marketing advertisement for the land.

Commentators ask about this as well since the word used in the verse “*v'natati* – I will give” is usually used when referring to positive things that God will give to the nation. But a curse? How is that positive?

Rashi actually says that it is a “*Besora hi lahem*- this is good news for them”. He brings the famous Midrash that we learn in school. The Amoraim who lived in the land before Israel conquered it, had hidden gold in the walls of the houses throughout the 40 years that the Jews were wandering in the desert. When the Children of Israel finally settle in the land their homes were to get *Tzara'at* and they would therefore have to destroy the walls of their homes, and then they would find the gold. In that way *Tzara'at* brought good fortune to the Jewish people.

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi in the Kuzari and the Ramban after him have a different explanation. *Tzara'at* is not a natural phenomenon at all – it is a miracle. When the nation is close to God and does His will, then they have “a good skin day” – their skin is beautiful. But if someone sins and distances himself from God then God will send him a sign on his body, clothes or house. This is a blessing because then the person can introspect and remedy his ways.

The Rambam in the 16th chapter of the laws of *Tzara'at* – Halacha 10 even says that *Tzara'at* is “*ot ufele*- a sign and wonder” that God gave to Israel to warn people from speaking *lashon hara* – undesirable speech. If he speaks *lashon hara* then the walls of his house are smitten with *Tzara'at*. If he doesn't repent and improve the way he speaks his house is destroyed. If he still

doesn't change the ways of his tongue then his clothes are "changed" by *Tzara'at*. If he improves then he becomes *tahor*, if he continues to speak poorly about others, then his clothes are burned and his skin will be infected with *Tzara'at*. Then he will have to be quarantined. Being all alone, where he will not have the opportunity to speak with anyone at all he may realize that it's not wise to continue speaking poorly about others.

In this day and age when the media is filled with people talking derogatorily about each other, and when everyone likes to talk badly about Israel it is so easy to follow the atmosphere and be loose with our tongues as well. Wouldn't it be nice to have a way to remind us to be more careful and talk "lashon tov – good words" about others around us and about the land of Israel that we live in. According to the Rambam that is what *Tzara'at* is. A reminder to the person – that he has spoken *Lashon Hara* and he should be more careful next time.

As we slowly get back to normal after our year of Corona when we were physically distanced from so many people, and when many experienced their own quarantines when they were alone, we must be careful not to "socially distance" people by how we speak about them. We can take the lessons of *Tzara'at* as a true blessing to help us build our character in how we communicate positively with and about all those around us. ■



RECIPE

If a person's house gets signs of *Tzara'at* on it then the Cohen will examine the house to see if there are penetrating streaks that are

bright green or bright red which appear to be below the surface of the wall (14:37). To purify the house he shall bring two birds. So this week's recipe includes chicken (foul-the birds) and both red and green peppers to remind about the *Tzara'at* on the house. In the process of determining if the house is pure or impure the Kohen may instruct that they remove the stones of the house – so in the recipe we use chicken pieces that look like stones.

GREEN AND RED PEPPER CHICKEN STIR FRY

- 10 fresh mushrooms (optional)
- 500 g chicken breast, cut into pieces
- 3 tablespoons oil
- 5 slices ginger
- 1 green pepper, sliced
- 1 red pepper, sliced
- 1 tablespoon wine
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1/2 teaspoon oil
- 1 pinch salt

Mix last 4 ingredients to make a marinade sauce. Add chicken and mushrooms and marinate for at least an hour. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil and stir fry the chicken till about 80% cooked. Put aside. Heat up the remaining oil and stir fry the ginger until aromatic. Add in the bell peppers and stir-fry until you smell the peppery aroma. Add the chicken pieces and stir to combine with the peppers. Add in the mushroom and remaining sauce. While frying, stir continuously until the sauce thickens and the chicken is completely cooked. Dish out and serve immediately.