



## DIVREI MENACHEM

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# The Symbol in the Symbol

Jung's classical theory propagates that symbols are produced by humanity from the unconscious to the conscious through archetypal forms, expressed geometrically or in the shape of humans and animals. In contrast, the Torah *provides us* with the symbols that consciously help us cope with our existential states and nurture our collective memory and historical heritage.

The shofar, lulav, tzitzit, mezuzah, and tefillin are perfect examples as they engage our intellect, emotions, and actions in recalling our shared national and religious strivings whose roots extend back thousands of years.

The case of the Metzora, described in our Parsha, is a good case in point. The unique laws surrounding the Metzora's long, drawn-out purification process are replete with symbolic messages designed to stir talebearers and slanderers to mend their ways.

The erring individual is forced out of the camp to reflect on past deeds and degradation. Then the Kohen performing the purifying process takes from the sinner two birds, cedarwood, crimson thread, and hyssop, to be used in the cleansing ceremony.

The birds symbolize the chatter of gossip; the tall cedar signifies haughtiness and

callous talk, while the crimson drawn from a tiny insect and the lowly hyssop are indicative of the penitent's new-found humility.

Furthermore, the Metzora shaves head, beard, and eyebrows. The head matches the sinner's superiority complex; the beard frames the mouth that uttered the Lashon Hara. The eyebrows represent the trait of "*Tzarut Ha'ayin*" – the jealousy that motivates one to destroy another's reputation.

The Metzora brings three offerings: A guilt offering that atones for attributes giving rise to the Lashon Hara; a sin offering for the blasphemies uttered while "unclean"; and elevation and meal offerings that elevate the Metzora to take his place in society. During the guilt offering, the Kohen dips his finger in oil and sprinkles it upon the miscreant's middle ear, thumb, and big toe to indicate the Metzora's need to improve social behavior in mind, deed, and effort.

It takes one nasty moment to assassinate another person's character and just one minute to destroy a world. However, the process of repair is long and tedious. Hopefully, as we reflect on past misdeeds, the Torah's symbols remind us of our mission. Perhaps we should best look at them very closely so that we might better "remember all of Hashem's commandments and observe them...." (Third paragraph of the Shema). ■

Shabbat Shalom! Menachem Persoff