

Parashat Metzora

The first section of Parashat Metzora outlines the procedure that a *metzora* – a person stricken with bodily *tzara'at* – must follow as part of his purification process. The Torah introduces this discussion by stating that the guidelines presented here are to be followed "*be-yom taharato*" – "on the day of his purification" – meaning, the day on which the *tzara'at* is cured. *Torat Kohanim* infers from this verse that the *metzora* must not delay his purification process. As soon as the *tzara'at* leaves his skin and he is capable of undergoing this process and restoring his state of purity, he must immediately consult a *kohen* and begin the procedure outlined in this *parasha*.

Rav Yehuda Leib Ginsburg, in his *Yalkut Yehuda*, comments on this *halakha*, "For once he is pure, he should not delay the matter and excessively torment himself by remaining in isolation, separated from people. He must rather perform these *mitzvot* in order that he can live in the normal manner of people." In his view, this *halakha* involves more than the general rule of *zerizin makdimin le-mitzvot*, which requires zeal, fervour and alacrity in performing *mitzvot*. In the case of the *metzora*, *Halakha* is also concerned with his speedy return to normal social activity.

The Torah does not wish for the *metzora* to remain in isolation any longer than necessary. Social engagement is an aspect of living that the Torah strongly encourages, and which it does not seek to deny even a *metzora* once the prescribed period of confinement has ended. Rav Ginsburg cites in this context *Chazal's* famous remark criticizing the *nazir* for voluntarily abstaining from wine. He comments that just as the Torah does not encourage denying oneself the physical delights of the world, so does it not call for individuals to abstain from the enjoyment of social activities. (Of course, this comparison works in the opposite direction, as well: just as the Torah mandates moderation in physical indulgence, so is moderation necessary in the area of socialization.)

We might add that the *metzora*, who was condemned to a period of solitude as punishment for his gossip and tale-bearing,

might be initially hesitant to return to his friends and social milieu. Having experienced the harsh repercussions of excessive socialization and intrusion upon the privacy of other people, he might seek to withdraw entirely from social life rather than run the risk of once again abusing the privilege of social contact. For this reason, perhaps, the Torah writes that the *metzora* "shall be brought to the *kohen*," which Ibn Ezra understood to mean that other people should bring him and have him begin his process of purification. Ibn Ezra explained that the *metzora* might not take the initiative to approach the *kohen* because of his unwillingness to endure the cost and inconvenience of the process entailed in regaining purification.

Additionally, however, we might suggest that the individual might be reluctant to re-enter his social circle, where he may again fail in his responsibilities to the privacy and dignity of his fellow townspeople. His peers must therefore take the initiative and invite him to return, reassuring him of the importance of social engagement and his ability to conduct himself properly in this context.