

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

5 Nisan, 5771 Vol. 12, No. 23

Parashas Metzora

“AND THE KOHEIN SHALL COMMAND AND HE WILL SLAUGHTER ONE BIRD...” (VAYIKRA 14:5)

It can never come back again

The Torah describes the offering for the purification of the *metzora*, which involves two birds, one which is slaughtered and one which is set free. According to the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 16:9), we learn from here that just as a bird that is killed can never be brought back, so too, when *tzara'as* is healed it can never come back again to that person. However, the Midrash continues, if the person sins again, the *tzara'as* will indeed return (see commentary of Maharzu). In other words, according to natural law, the person should be immune to further episodes of *tzara'as*, but Hashem miraculously suspends the laws of nature and allows it to return if the person reverts to his sinful ways. This is an illustration of Hashem's kindness, giving sinners a chance to do *teshuva*, utilizing the “message” of *tzara'as* as a wake-up call to repent. The Midrash goes on to say that this can happen even a third time, comparing this pattern to the revolting behavior of a dog that revisits food it has regurgitated. Similarly, how disgusting is the act of one who has done *teshuva* and yet slipped back a second or even third time to his sinful habits. Nevertheless, despite it all, Hashem tells this person, “I will heal you if you do a complete and sincere *teshuva*.”

What would you say about his actions?

We must remember that *tzara'as* only afflicted a generation that was great enough to deserve its spiritual message, which constituted a direct communication from Hashem to do *teshuva* for specific sins, such as *lashon hara*, arrogance, etc. Imagine a Jew from such an illustrious generation, who had sinned and received this message from Heaven, and has now taken it to heart and done *teshuva*. He is healed and resumes normal life – but later starts sinning again. What would you say about his actions? He knows it's wrong. He was just punished and publicly humiliated by having to go through the entire process of staying outside the community, wearing torn clothes, covering his face, proclaiming his impurity out loud so all should avoid him, and finally, having to shave his entire body bald. How could he now flagrantly transgress the same sin again? Isn't this person a rebellious, mutinous scoundrel who is aware of Hashem and His Torah and yet tramples on His laws? Does he deserve a second or even a third chance? Should Hashem reverse the natural order to send this sinner a message of love, urging him to return once more?

He waits with open arms for us to return – again, and again, and again!

What a remarkable degree of love Hashem has for every Jew! Not only will such a *teshuva* be accepted, a second and even a third time, but Hashem will change the laws of nature, performing miracles to allow the *tzara'as* to return and convey the message of his sinful behavior to this repeat offender. Hashem never gives up on us – He waits with open arms for us to return – again, and again, and again! In His infinite love and patience He sends messages to us to come back to Him, even after we have turned away from Him time and time again. Furthermore, we see the amazing ability of every Jew to do *teshuva*, no matter how far he has strayed.

Let us appreciate the depth of Hashem's love for us, and never give up on ourselves and our ability to get back up and correct ourselves when we stumble. Let us try to emulate Him in feeling that love for our fellow Jews, and in caring for them in any way possible – and certainly by reaching out to them and bringing them close to the loving embrace of our Father in Heaven.