

It's Caused by Seven Sins

PARSHA INSIGHTS - TAZRIA METZORA (5758)

A STYLE OF TZORA'AS TO FIT THE NEEDS OF ALMOST ANY SINNER

Today we read numerous verses describing *tzora'as* [a leprous-like affliction], the supernatural disease which affected people who committed certain transgressions. To appreciate this unusual ailment, we will study the *Gemara* in *Erchin* 16A with the *Maharsha*. Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmaini said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan that forms of *tzora'as* (“*nega'im*”) come because of seven sins:

1. *Loshon hora* [evil gossip];
2. Murder;
3. False oaths;
4. Immorality;
5. Arrogance;
6. Robbery; and,
7. Stinginess.

Rashi says that the last one refers to a person who refuses to lend his possessions to neighbors.

The *Maharsha* notices that this list contains sins that vary in their levels of severity. If some are worse than others, why do they all bring on the same punishment of *tzora'as*? *Maharsha* remarks that in truth, not all *tzora'as* is created equal; there are differing levels of intensity. We find numerous types of *tzora'as*, *nega'im*, mentioned in the *psukim* [verses] and clarified in the Oral Torah. An entire tractate called *Nega'im* is devoted to their *dinim* [laws]. These come as the result of the seven major transgressions listed in our *Gemara Erchin*. We will now list some (NOT ALL) major forms of *tzora'as* (see *Rambam* in *Hilchos Tumas Tzora'as*). Then, we will see how the *Gemara* associates the seven transgressions with seven cases of *tzora'as*.



An acute case of *tzora'as* is a **BAHERES**, a very bright spot, white as snow.

A second is **S'AIS**, a swelling or sore whose color resembles that of clean wool of a young lamb. “*Sapachas*” is a subcategory of *baheres* or of *s'ais*.

Another variety is **NESEK**, discolored skin within a bald spot on the head or beard.

An additional one is **KORACHAS or GABACHAS**. *Korachas* is *tzora'as* on the back of the head which has become entirely bald. *Gabachas* is similar, but it occurs on the front of the head.

Another category are the *tzora'as* afflictions which break out on clothes - **NIG'AI BEGADIM**. Or else, the impurity of *tzora'as* on the walls of a house can be transmitted to the clothes and vessels inside, if they are not removed in a timely fashion.

Finally, *tzora'as* can be found on houses themselves - **NIG'AI BATIM**.

With these varieties of *tzora'as* in mind, we will move ahead on *Erchin* 16, incorporating the words of the *Maharsha* into our explanation of the *Gemara*.

1. How do *Chazal* [our Sages] know that one who speaks *loshon hora* contracts *tzora'as*? A source is *Tehillim* [Psalms] 101:5, where Hashem says: “Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly, I will cut him off”. *Maharsha* comments that *loshon hora*, in a certain sense, is the worst of the sins enumerated here. What does the *pasuk* [verse] in *Tehillim* mean, that Hashem will “cut off” the slanderer? *Maharsha* interprets that the person will become a **METZORA MUCHLAT**. This means there will be no doubt about his impure status when he reports to the *kohen* [priest] to have his *tzora'as* checked. He will immediately be declared *tamai* [impure], with no need to close him up first to see if the affliction will heal. The *ba'al loshon hora* [one who perpetually speaks evil gossip] deserves to be “cut off”, abruptly dismissed from his community. After living apart from society for awhile, he will need atonement - haircut and sacrifices. This is one degree of *tzora'as*.

As we continue the *Gemara*, please refer back to the original  list when each connection is made.

2. From where do we know that a murderer will be stricken with *tzora'as*? This is found in *Shmuel Bais* [2nd Samuel] 3. The beginning of that *perek* [chapter] tells us that after the death of *Shaul Hamelech* [King Saul], there was warfare between the house of Shaul and the house of Dovid. For reasons clarified in those *psukim*, the general who had always been loyal to Shaul, named Avner ben Nair, switched sides and became Dovid's ally. Yoav, Dovid's long-time general, killed Avner ben Nair (3:27). Outraged by this crime, Dovid stated that "I and my kingdom are guiltless before Hashem forever from the blood of Avner ben Nair; let it rest on the head of Yoav and on all his father's house; and let the house of Yoav never lack... those who are afflicted with *tzora'as*" (3:28-29). Yoav killed Avner because Avner had formerly killed his brother in battle, but Dovid ruled that this heinous act was murder. We see that this sin brings *tzora'as*. *Maharsha* says that this is called **NESEK**, one mentioned above. How does he know? Since it says that it should rest on the HEAD of Yoav and his father's house, it fits the description of *nesek*, as explained before.

3. How about false oaths? What is the source that they cause *tzora'as*? Here is the background, found in *Melachim Bais* [2nd Kings] 5. Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was sick with *tzora'as*. The prophet, Elisha, told him to wash in the Jordan River seven times for relief. This miraculously healed him, and he offered a gift of gratitude to Elisha. Elisha refused, but his servant, Gaichazi, had different plans. He ran after Naaman and devised a scheme to obtain some of his wealth. Our *Gemara* explains that since Naaman was not sure about the truthfulness of Gaichazi's claim that Elisha had sent him to solicit silver and clothing, Naaman made Gaichazi swear. This was obviously a false oath. Elisha perceived Gaichazi's wrongdoing with his Divine intuition, and he placed a curse upon him. "Naaman's *tzora'as* will cling to you and your children forever!" (*Melachim Bais*, 5:27). The *pasuk* then records that Gaichazi left him, stricken with *tzora'as* resembling the color of snow. We see that *tzora'as* can be precipitated by a false oath. The *Maharsha* feels that Gaichazi's *tzora'as* was **BAHERES**, since it was white as snow.

4. The fourth transgression is sexual immorality. The basis for this resulting in *tzora'as* is *Beraishis* [Genesis] 12. When Avram descended to Egypt because of a famine in Canaan, Sarai was captured and taken to Paroh for promiscuous purposes. "And Hashem struck Paroh with great afflictions ('nega'im'), and his house, because of the matter of Sarai..." (12:17). *Maharsha* remarks that this *tzora'as*, indicated by the word "*nega'im*", was most likely the above mentioned **S' AIS**. How do we know? Since Paroh was struck with "*nega'im*", in the plural, this was probably *s'ais*, since *s'ais* by nature contains various strains of *tzora'as*. This *is* as we said before, that *s'ais* contains within it a subcategory called *sapachas*.

5. Haughtiness is next on the list of sins which can cause *tzora'as*. The *Gemara* cites *Divrai Hayamim Bais* 26 for this. King Uziyahu, a non-*kohen* [non-priest], brazenly entered the *Kodesh* [holy area] in the *Bais Hamikdash* [Temple] to offer incense on the golden *ketores* [incense] altar. This stemmed from his trait of arrogance, as stated in 26:16. "The *tzora'as* broke out on his forehead" (26:19). Our *Maharsha* assumes that it could have been **GABACHAS**, since it occurred on the front of his head, as explained above in the list of *tzora'as* varieties.

6. Robbery also brings *tzora'as*. The *Gemara* here points out that when a person reports possible *tzora'as* in his house, the *kohen* orders the house emptied of its contents (our *parsha* [Torah portion], 14:36). Why is this fitting? Since he stole money of others, the *kohen* comes and scatters HIS money. *Maharsha* clarifies that robbery can actually lead to the impurity of *tzora'as* affecting garments. If the building materials themselves were stolen, the house will be stricken, and the clothes inside can also contract the *tumah* [impurity]. These are **NIG'AI BEGADIM**, *tzora'as* of clothing.

7. Selfishness causes *tzora'as*. Someone who feels his house is only his, not allowing the poor to partake of his food and lodging, will end up with a dwelling infected with this ailment. It will show up on the very walls. That is classified as **NIG'AI BATIM**.

We have discovered that there are numerous varieties of *tzora'as*. They are brought directly by Hashem for seven sins. This serves as a reminder for us to avoid these wrongdoings and to serve our Creator with sincere devotion.

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