

Insights from the Meshech Chochma

רב מאיר שמחה הכהן מדווינסק זצ"ל פרשת תזריע תשפ"ד

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וְאִישׁ כִּי יִמְרֹט רֹאשׁוֹ קִרְחַת הוּא קְהוֹר הוּא... אִישׁ צְרוּעַ הוּא טָמֵא הוּא... בְּרֹאשׁוֹ נִגְעוּ. (פרק מא, מד)
If the hair of a man head falls out; He is bald at the back of his head, he is pure... He is a person with tzaraas, he is contaminated... his affliction is upon his head.

Our pasukim bookend the Parsha dealing with *tzaraas* of the scalp. In all previous cases, the pronouncement of טוּמְאָה is with the phrase נִגְעַת צְרוּעַת הוּא /it is a *tzaraas* affliction and yet here the Torah declares the person an אִישׁ צְרוּעַ? What is the Torah trying to teach us with the change?

The Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh explains that in general, Hashem displays great concern for the sensitivities of a person, even when He punishes him. And that is why most other *tzaraas* afflictions listed in our Parsha occur in the more private parts of the body and are not for public viewing. Let the sinner know and repent but let him not be humiliated unnecessarily. The pasuk itself therefore also refers to the situation in a more oblique way, נִגְעַת צְרוּעַת הוּא. The *tzaraas* of baldness though is different. The Torah is indicating Hashem's extreme displeasure with one whom He has plagued in such exposed areas such as the skin of the head. The person described here as צְרוּעַ has forfeited the consideration Hashem normally shows even to sinners. The words בְּרֹאשׁוֹ נִגְעוּ i.e., that his affliction has struck his head, are in fact the justification for calling him a צְרוּעַ.

Rav Meir Simcha's answer to this question is more expansive. He begins with a statement from a Mishnah in סוּטָה ח: "According to the measure which one measures his actions, the Heavenly tribunal measures for him in return i.e., in whatever manner one conducts himself, Divine judgement deals with him in a similar way." מִדָּה כְּנִגְדָּה מִדָּה. R' Yosef explains that although the exact measure of the four types of court-imposed capital punishment have ceased to exist, as there is no court today empowered to adjudicate and apply corporal punishment, the "according to the measure" punishment mentioned by our Mishnah has not ceased.

Continues Rav Meir Simcha: With regards to *tzaraas*, we are told by R' Shmuel bar Nachmani in עֲרֵכִין טז. that it afflicts a person for seven sinful actions or behaviors. The last listed is one who is stingy and does not help his friend by lending him needed utensils; he will have his house afflicted with *tzaraas* i.e., he treated his house as being exclusively his and did not allow others to share his property, he will be punished by not

being able to use his own house. The tight-fisted owner will be shown, “who is the real boss”. The other six transgressions listed include לְשׁוֹן הַרֵעַ, bloodshed, an oath taken in vain, גִּילּוּי עֲרִיּוֹת, arrogance and theft. Rav Meir Simcha suggests that we can surmise that one who has *tzaraas* on his head, and especially on the scalp, which covers the brain, the center of intellectual function, must have utilized his שִׁכּוֹל for inappropriate ideas and thoughts emanating from it e.g., haughtiness, which is often related to issues with the גִּאֲוָה's faith in HKBH. And the Torah explicitly states this in וְרָם לְבַבְךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ: דְּבָרִים ח' יד 'And your heart will become haughty, and you will forget Hashem. The *tzaraas* develops on the head-מִדָּה-מִדָּה. Some of the other listed actions and behaviors though, e.g., גִּילּוּי עֲרִיּוֹת or anger which can lead to bloodshed, are more instinctual and reflexive, and are not necessarily cognitive based; for these, *tzaraas* may appear on other parts of the sinner's body.

Not at all surprising, Rav Meir Simcha “finds” a pasuk in דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים ב' כו which addresses this exact point. The chapter presents the tremendous military successes of King Uzziah and then tells us that *when he was strong, he grew so arrogant that he acted corruptly* and was about to perform the exclusively Kohen's קְטֹרֶת service when *behold!* וְהִצְרַעַת וְהִצְרַעַת זָרְחָה /*tzaraas broke out on his forehead*. He immediately ran out of the Beis HaMikdash ה' נִגְעוּ /*for he knew that Hashem had struck him with tzaraas*. King Uzziah's actions stemmed from a haughtiness that made him, as Rav Meir Simcha puts it, מְשׁוּבָשׁ and therefore *בְּמִצְחוֹ*! So that the *אִישׁ צְרוּעַ* הוא is highlighting the idea that it is only Man and no other species, who has this extremely high-level cognitive ability which can be used for so much good but can also be used very inappropriately, as described above.

Interestingly, Rav Yitzchak Sorotzkin in his sefer *Oznayim I'Torah* says regarding the phrase *אִישׁ צְרוּעַ* הוא, “I saw Mefarshim who posit that the *tzaraas* ‘sprouted’ on his head because of דעות נפסדות emanating from it.” He adds that these improper thoughts can lead to *עֲבֹדָה זָרָה* and in fact we find in סנהדרין קז. R Yehuda says that *רֹאשׁ* is a euphemism for *עֲבֹדָה זָרָה*. So that it is quite appropriate for our pasuk to tell us *בְּרֹאשׁוֹ* נִגְעוּ!

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