

Insights from the Meshech Chochma

רב מאיר שמחה הכהן מדווינסק זצ"ל

פרשת מצורע תשפ"ד

Shulie Plawes

...וּפָנּוּ אֶת הַבַּיִת בְּטָרִם יָבֹא הַכֹּהֵן לִרְאוֹת אֶת הַנֶּגַע וְלֹא יִטְמָא כָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת וְאַחַר כֵּן יָבֹא הַכֹּהֵן לִרְאוֹת אֶת הַבַּיִת. (פרק יד' לו')

...and they shall clear the house before the Kohen comes to look at the affliction, so that everything in the house should not become contaminated; and afterward, the Kohen shall come to look at the house.

This portion of the complicated rules of *Tzaraas* deals with afflictions in houses. The homeowner approached the Kohen and informed him that *בְּנֶגַע-something like an affliction, appeared to me in the house*. Notice that he uses a word of uncertainty. Rashi explains that this is to teach us that even if the owner is a Torah scholar and he is certain that it is an affliction, he should not render judgement with a definitive statement i.e., an affliction has befallen my house, but rather he should say *בְּנֶגַע* for it is not a *נֶגַע* until the Kohen declares it to be such. From where is this derived? It is from our pasuk's redundancy i.e., the word *וְיָצִיחַ הַכֹּהֵן... בְּטָרִם יָבֹא הַכֹּהֵן* is superfluous, for had it written *יָבֹא לִרְאוֹת אֶת הַנֶּגַע* we would have understood that *יָבֹא לִרְאוֹת* is referring to the Kohen. Rashi explains that it is this extra *הַכֹּהֵן* which is the source for the rule i.e., until the Kohen makes his pronouncement, the house is not impure. So that *וְלֹא יִטְמָא כָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת* is telling us that the contents of the house can be saved from the impurity resulting from the Kohen's declaration by removing the items from it beforehand.

Rav Meir Simcha is bewildered by our pasuk-as he puts it-it is *מְגַבִּיל* i.e., "it is not in the same playing field" for the beginning of the pasuk speaks of the Kohen looking at a *נֶגַע* in a house but it concludes with him looking at the house, with no mention of the *נֶגַע*?

To appreciate Rav Meir Simcha's approach to our pasuk, background information is needed. When a Kohen investigates the potential *נֶגַע* and declares that it is one, he must quarantine the house. He returns after seven days and if it has spread in the walls of the house, he removes the stones that contain the *נֶגַע*, scrapes and removes the mortar surrounding the stones and deposits it outside the city onto a contaminated place. The removed stones and mortar are replaced. Another week will pass before the Kohen returns to examine the situation. The house's *טָמֵא* status during these two weeks is referred to as *הֶסְגֵּר* and the pasuk tells us that if someone enters the house and remains there long enough to recline and eat a standard meal, the garments he is wearing become contaminated along with him. If he does not remain in the house for that minimum time then only he is *טָמֵא*, but not his clothing. Garments that he is carrying but not wearing e.g., a coat slung over his

shoulder, or anything else that is in the house or is brought into the house would become contaminated immediately. If the Kohen returns at the end of the two weeks and notices that the affliction has, as the Torah says, “*Erupted in the house,*” the house must be demolished, for it has acquired טומאת ההֶחֱלֵט.

Continues Rav Meir Simcha: One could think that a practical difference between הֶסְגֵּר and הֶחֱלֵט would be the following: הֶסְגֵּר depends solely on the Kohen’s proclamation. If over the two-week period the affliction “weakens” or (at least) does not spread, the Kohen can declare the house טָהוֹר. The essential factor is clearly the Kohen, not the נִגְעָה itself. And therefore, the contents of the house become טָמֵא only *after* he says it is a הֶסְגֵּר. With regards to הֶחֱלֵט, the נִגְעָה *itself* has changed; now it is called a מְמַאֲרֵת. One might compare this נִגְעָה to a corpse, which is *intrinsically* טָמֵא. And just as the contents of a house *retroactively* become טָמֵא from the time it was known that the corpse was there, we could say similarly regarding this הֶחֱלֵט. So that if a person sees a נִגְעָה in his house and removes the contents and that נִגְעָה eventually becomes a מְמַאֲרֵת, the contents of the house *should* be טָמֵא from the moment of its appearance! And what a major headache this would be for the owner! The Kohen/Torah’s “advice” יָבֵא הַכֹּהֵן יְבִטְרֵם יְבִטְרֵם אֶת הַבַּיִת בְּטָרֵם יְבִטְרֵם would be of no help in this situation. Rav Meir Simcha says that this is not so. The “starting point” for both הֶסְגֵּר and הֶחֱלֵט is not the appearance but rather the Kohen’s declaration that it truly is a נִגְעָה. And he “sees” this in our pasuk. According to Rav Meir Simcha, the pasuk’s middle words, וְלֹא יִטְמָא כָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת are a fulcrum for both the beginning and end of the pasuk. With regards to the first half, וַיִּצְוֶה הַכֹּהֵן וּפְנֵי אֶת הַבַּיִת בְּטָרֵם יְבִא הַכֹּהֵן לְרִאוֹת אֶת הַנִּגְעָה is the advice to remove the house’s contents before the הֶסְגֵּר is declared, which we knew all along. But he also connects וְלֹא יִטְמָא כָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת with the end of the pasuk and reads it as, הַבַּיִת-וְלֹא יִטְמָא כָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת וְאַחַר כֵּן יְבִא הַכֹּהֵן לְרִאוֹת אֶת הַבַּיִת, is referring to several weeks later, when the נִגְעָה becomes the מְמַאֲרֵת and the house must be demolished; the pasuk is telling us that even with regards to הֶחֱלֵט, טומאת ההֶחֱלֵט, there would be no retroactive טומאה! Exactly *not* like טומאת מֵת!

Interestingly, Rav Meir Simcha refers to his approach to our pasuk as an עֲמֻקָּה. And his clarification of these complex topics is certainly appreciated!

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל
לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה
לזכר נשמת חמי מורי ר' יעקב נתן בן ר' ישראל שלמה ז"ל
ולזכר נשמת הרב יהודה בן ר' אברהם שמחה (קופרמן) זצ"ל
מחבר הגהות על ספר משך חכמה

Shavi and I would like to wish a heartfelt Mazel Tov to great-grandmother Mrs. Iti Wohlberg, great-grandfather Mr. Morty Davis, our machatanim Kal and Ruki Renov and to our children Tani and Chana, on the Bar Mitzva of their son, our grandson, Aaron Zelig. May he, as well as the rest of their beautiful family continue to give us true Yiddishe nachas, in good health, for many more years.