



Volume 6. Issue 30

Tzara'at Covering the Body

The first three *mishnayot* of the fourth *perek* of *Masechet Negaim* compare and contrast the three signs (*simanim*) of skin blemishes (נגעי עור הבשר) which constitute *tzaraat*. Skin blemishes exist with the appearance of either two white hairs in the blemish; live skin in the blemish; or spreading of the blemish. The Torah states that this blemish must be white, and the beginning of the *masechet* lists four shades of white that would render the blemish *tzaraat*.

The Torah also articulates a procedure to be undertaken by a *kohen* in assessing whether the blemish is indeed *tzaraat*.¹ Upon initial viewing, a *kohen* may immediately determine that the blemish is *tzaraat* if there are two white hairs or live skin inside the blemish. If neither of these symptoms exists, the *kohen* exiles the potential *tzarua* and returns after a week. If either of the aforementioned symptoms has manifested, the *kohen* deems the blemish *tzaraat*. Alternatively, if the blemish has increased in size or become whiter, it is deemed *tzaraat*. If it appears exactly the same as the week before, the *kohen* leaves the person in exile for a further week, at the conclusion of which the same procedure is followed. The only difference at the end of week two is that if none of the three signs have manifested, the person is considered *tahor* and allowed back into society.

If the person is in fact a *tzarua* (someone afflicted with *tzaraat*), he must wait until the symptoms pass before he can bring the necessary *korbanot* and become pure. The only exception to this rule with regard to these three signs is when the blemish spreads over the entire body of the person. In this case, the *tzarua* is declared *tahor*.² The *Mishnayot* in *Negaim* (4:1-2) explicitly qualify this as a characteristic of the 'spreading' *siman* of *tzaraat*, as distinct from the other two. That is, for example, if someone had white hairs all over their body, they would not be considered *tahor*.

Why does this *siman tahara* only apply to the 'spreading' *siman*? The answer would seem intuitive. The two white hairs that cause *tzaraat* must grow specifically from the blemish. Therefore, it follows that the only way the entire body could be covered with 'tzaraat hair' would be if the whole body is afflicted with the blemish. Were this to be

the case, the very fact that the blemish envelops the entire skin would suffice to make the *tzarua tahor* anyway.³ In the case of the *siman* of live skin in the blemish, the very presence of live skin means that the body could not be completely covered in a blemish, which is the basis of the *tahara*.

On a philosophical level we may ask why when a *tzarua* is completely covered by *tzaraat* he is deemed *tahor*, whilst when he is partially covered he is *tameh*. *R' Bachya* explains that this is indeed unintuitive, and is an example of a *chok* – a *mitzvah* unintelligible to the limited human psyche.

Rav Hirsch posits that the Torah has lost hope for this *tzarua*. *Tzaraat* is an affliction caused by a spiritual shortcoming, *lashon hara*. When there is only partial *tzaraat*, the person is isolated and left to reflect on the actions which have caused this malady. It is assumed that the *tzaraat* will be a wakeup call for him to change his ways. But once the person is completely covered, the Torah purifies the person and sends him back into society, as it is evident that this individual is utterly indifferent to his moral pitfalls, and no amount of segregation will coerce him into changing.

In diametric opposition, the *Chafetz Chaim* suggests that partial *tzaraat* may lead the *tzarua* to think that he incidentally spoke *lashon hara* and he has no fundamental problem to set right. Therefore, the Torah sends him into isolation to notify him that indeed he must improve his ways. However, the engulfed *tzarua* recognises on his own accord that he has serious issues to remedy, and will naturally do *teshuva*.

Ibn Ezra seems to go one step further. It is not that the full covering of *tzaraat* will spur the *tzarua* to mend his ways, but rather that he has already undertaken serious *chesbon nefesh* during his time in exile,⁴ and this has allowed him to completely 'sweat out' the 'virus' (ie *lashon hara*) which has caused the *tzaraat*. The spiritually defective *lashon hara* pent up in his soul has transformed itself into a physical manifestation, *tzaraat*, thereby cleansing the soul of the *tzarua* and making him *tahor*.⁵

Jeremy Herz

¹ The procedure for determination of the status of the blemish differs between *tzaraat* of a house, clothing and human. See *Vayikra* 13, 14.

² *Vayikra* 13:12-13.

³ If these were white hairs that did not sprout from a blemish, then in any case they would not cause *tzaraat*.

⁴ A *tzarua* can only become *tahor* when he is completely covered by *tzaraat* if he has already served a period of time in exile.

⁵ See *Ibn Ezra*, *Vayikra* 13:13.

Revision Questions

נגעים ג: ג' – ד': ח'

- How can a *metzora* become *tameh* for “two weeks”? How many days constitutes these “two weeks”? (ג: ג')
- What are the three different signs (regarding a skin *nega*) that indicate a *metzora* is *tameh* (*muchlat*)? (ג: ג')
- Is there a difference between these signs as to when they are significant? (ג: ג')
- What is the maximum quarantine period for a *nega shchin* and *michva*? (ד': ג')
- What are the two indications of *tumah* (*muchlat*) for *shchin* and *michva* and how do they differ from one another? (ד': ג')
- What is the maximum *hesger* period for *netakin*? (ה': ג')
- What are the two signs of *tumah muchlat* for *netakin*? (ה': ג')
- What is the maximum *hesger* period for *karachat* and *gabachat*? (ו': ג')
- What are the two signs of *tumah* for them? (ו': ג')
- What is the maximum *hesger* period for a *nega* on clothing? (ז': ג')
- What are the three signs of *tumah* for a *nega* on clothing? (ז': ג')
- What is the maximum *hesger* period for a *nega* on a house? (ח': ג')
- What are the three signs of *tumah* for a *nega* on a house? (ח': ג')
- What are the minimum a maximum *hesger* periods relating to all *negaim*? (ח': ג')
- What are the legal difference between the following signs indicating a *metzora* *muchlat*:
 - White hairs and *Fishayon*? (ד': א')
 - *M'chiya* and *Fishayon*? (ד': ב')
 - White hairs and *M'chiya*? (ד': ג')
- What is the minimum length of the two white hairs? (ד': ד')
- What is the law if the white hairs if black roots? (ד': ד')
- Can a single split hair, which looks like two hairs, be considered as two hairs for this law? (ד': ד')
- What is the law regarding a *beheret* exactly the size of a *g'ris* that has both white and black hairs? (ד': ד')
- How wide must a “*chut*” extending from *beheret* to another be for it to combine them? (ד': ה')
- For what other law is this dimension important? (ד': ה')
- Explain the debate regarding a *baheret* the size of *g'ris* surround a *m'chiya* that has white hairs inside it. (ד': ו')
- What other case is debated in a similar way and when do they agree? (ד': ו')
- What is the difference between whether a *nega* disappears and returns during the week of *hesger* or if it occurs after the *p'tur*? (ד': ז')
- When does a *nega* changing colour have now effect? (ד': ז')
- Explain the debate regarding a case where the *nega* spreads and recedes. (ד': ח')
- Explain the debate regarding a case where a *k'gris* sized *nega* spreads a half *g'ris* in one direction, but a half *gris* portion of the original *nega* to the other size disappears. (ד': ח')

Local Shiurim

Sunday -Thursday

After maariv
Mizrachi Shul

Friday & Shabbat

10 minutes before mincha
Beit Ha'Roeh

Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
13 th September כ"ד אלול	14 th September ב"ה אלול	15 th September כ"ו אלול	16 th September כ"ז אלול	17 th September כ"ח אלול	18 th September כ"ט אלול	19 th September א' תשרי ראש השנה Negaim 6:5-6
Negaim 4:9-10	Negaim 4:11-5:1	Negaim 5:2-3	Negaim 5:4-5	Negaim 6:1-2	Negaim 6:3-4	

