

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : תזריע

1. This Sidra continues with the theme of the previous Sidra, that is, the laws of *Tum'oh* and *Taharoh*. (“Tum’oh” is a state of spiritual uncleanness; “Taharoh” is the condition of spiritual cleanness, and is also the name given to the process of dispelling the state of “Tum’oh.”)

As with all the laws of the Torah of HaShem, but especially the “Chukkim” (laws for which no reason is stated in the Torah) we humans can be guided in our proper observance of them, and enjoy the resulting benefits, only by following what HaShem has decreed in His Torah and by carefully complying with the teachings of our Chachommim, of blessed memory. HaShem, in His great goodness, has called us into being to be His Own People, to come close to Him in holiness by living our lives in accordance with His holy Torah. In this Torah, HaShem has revealed to us which conditions will promote this, our spiritual fulfilment, and our purpose, and which will hinder it. Although no blame or criticism is implied in the condition of Tum’oh as such, nevertheless it is a condition or state that does not allow one to attain closeness to HaShem. (Obviously, one is blameless for one’s state of Tum’oh only if it results innocently or naturally. The same cannot be said about Tum’oh which is brought about by deliberate disobedience of HaShem’s law.) In any case, in His Infinite Wisdom, HaShem has ordained that the conditions of Tum’oh are to be avoided, and that we are to aspire to a condition of Taharoh.

In common with all laws of Tum’oh and Taharoh, HaShem has commanded the following laws only to us, His Chosen People. We alone are affected by these conditions, whether brought about by things external (like coming into contact with something Tommay) or whether brought about by conditions in ourselves (that is, a condition of Tum’oh which results from the body itself). This Sidra is concerned in the main with this second category of Tum’oh.

2. The Sidra begins with the Laws pertaining to a woman who gives birth, and states that in the case of the birth of a male child, the mother is Tommay for seven days, whereas if she gives birth to a female child, the state of Tum’oh lasts for fourteen days. (Nowadays, this state of Tum’oh is observed in accordance with the regular laws of Family Purity, and the condition of Taharoh is achieved through immersion in the Mikveh after the usual procedures.) The Torah prescribes the *Korbonnos* that the mother is to bring on completion of her days of Taharoh, after which she is allowed once again to come to the Mikdash and may again partake of *Koddoshim*.
3. The Sidra then continues with the laws of “Nego’im,” with specific reference to “Tzoraas.” Unfortunately, these two words are commonly so mistranslated as to ignore their true meaning and to neglect the spiritual aspect of these laws of HaShem. In fact, the word “נגע”, usually translated as “plague,” comes from the same word as means “touch.” In times past, when the Jewish People were truly a holy people (even greater

and holier than now) and were on a superior spiritual level, they deserved the special attention of HaShem, which ensured that they remained on their high level. If, therefore, an individual allowed himself to slip, either through word or deed, he would be reminded of his high calling by being afflicted with a sign that denoted that he must repent his ways. He was, so to speak, “touched” by the Finger of G-d, to point out to him the error of his ways. These reminders usually came in the form of “Tzoraas”.

4. Despite its physical manifestation, Tzoraas is not a physical illness. Rather, it is the physical symptom of a spiritual malady, coming as it did upon those who spoke slander or who were proud and haughty. The very word “Tzoraas” implies a “foulness which breaks out” and indeed our Chachommim, of blessed memory, see in the word “מצורע” (that is, one who is smitten with Tzoraas) “he who brings forth evil”. The unfortunate mistranslation (and one that has done grave mischief to many, many innocent people worldwide) “leprosy”, has come about because leprosy (which in fact is “מוכה שחין” in Hebrew) in its initial stages sometimes bears some resemblance to the Tzoraas described in the Torah.
5. *Our Chachommim, of blessed memory, tell us that the warning of Tzoraas often came in stages. If a person was proud and haughty, first his house (that is, his wealth and possessions) would be stricken as patches of specific discolouration appeared on walls and other surfaces. If this warning did not suffice, his clothing (closer to his body than his house) would be affected. If this did not bring him to mend his ways, then he himself was afflicted and humiliated. And Tzoraas was indeed a severe affliction and was very humiliating.*
6. The very procedure and treatment of one who was afflicted with Tzoraas, too, shows that Tzoraas is not a medical illness at all but is to teach the person concerned to do Teshuvah: A person who suspected that he had Tzoraas had to be seen, not by a doctor, but by a Kohen. (The Kohanim are the moral guides and religious teachers of the Jewish People: as such, the Kohen would explain the gravity and implications of the Tzoraas.) In some cases, if certain conditions existed, the Kohen would pronounce the person “Tommy” straightaway. In other cases, the Kohen would order the person to be isolated for seven days until another examination was made — thus giving the person a chance to do Teshuvah. If the isolation had its desired effect, namely, the person did Teshuvah, resolving to be more modest and not to speak *Loshon HoRa*, then the marks would disappear and the Kohen would declare the person “Tohor”. If the first week’s isolation proved to be ineffective, the person was given a further week in which to repent his behaviour. If this second opportunity was not utilized, and the marks had not changed for the better, the person was declared Tommy.
7. Interestingly enough, but entirely consistent with the spiritual nature of Tzoraas, there could be situations where the Kohen would not pronounce the afflicted person as Tommy despite the fact that all the conditions for Tum’oh existed. (For example, a *Chosson* or *Kalloh* near to their wedding; or if the Tzoraas appeared just before Yom Tov: in such cases, the Torah considers that the warning would be startling enough to prompt the afflicted persons to better themselves and there would be no need to upset

their joyous occasion.) For even though a person had all the signs and symptoms of Tzoraas, the state of Tum'oh did not commence until the Kohen himself declared the person to be Tommay. Even a great *Talmid Chochom* who knows all the laws of what is and what is not Tzoraas, but who is not a Kohen, cannot declare the person to be Tommay. Only the Kohen, the Torah states, is authorized to make any declaration of Tum'oh or Taharoh.

8. The person declared Tommay by the Kohen had to live in isolation outside his town, in virtual excommunication. If anyone approached him, the afflicted person had to shout out that he was Tommay and warn others to keep away. His clothes were torn and his hair was grown long, as if he was a mourner. Considering that his plight was due to his slandermongering or his proud and haughty conduct, this was a fitting punishment indeed. For those who spread unpleasant reports and malicious gossip about their fellow men, causing their victims to suffer shame and embarrassment and to be isolated and rejected by family and friends, through Tzoraas were themselves made painfully aware of what it means to suffer such misery. Similarly, those who were proud and looked down upon others, through their own Tzoraas were made to feel what it means to be considered low and inferior. Once the sinner had had a taste of his own medicine, his future behaviour would be free from the faults which rendered him unfit to live amongst the Jewish People, whose greatest asset is to be its unity and brotherly feeling.
9. In the case of Tzoraas of garment or house, too, the lesson is clear. A haughty person, whose pride is usually seen in his ostentatious mode of dress and the showy display of his home and possessions, was soon brought to his senses and learned to be more modest and considerate of others when he was made to suffer the humiliation of Tzoraas. Indeed, our Chachommim, of blessed memory, point out that he who selfishly would not practice the great Mitzvah of hospitality could have found himself without his house: if he did not repent and the Tzoraas persisted, his house had to be demolished. For he who will not share the benefits of his home and possessions with those in need, does not deserve to have them.
10. *Nowadays, the phenomenon of Tzoraas does not exist. In a way, this must be seen as a sign of our sad decline, for we are not worthy of this constant correction by HaShem as in the olden days. But the lessons of Tzoraas, that unique "touching by the Finger of G-d" should be taken to heart by us all. We should also reflect on how great were the past generations that were worthy of such closeness to HaShem, and, although we ourselves are not at present granted the same special clearly-evident attention, we should aspire to that high spiritual level which truly demonstrated the specialness of HaShem's Chosen People, close to Him always.*

For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra תזריע please go to HAFTORAHS.