

Ready to Return

Rav Zvi Ron

In this week's parsha we read about the purification process for the *metzora*. This involves two birds, one that is slaughtered and one that is set free. Ibn Ezra explains that the pasuk that introduces the two birds (14:4) can be understood in two ways; either the *metzora* brings the birds to the Cohen, or the Cohen orders someone to bring birds using the money of the *metzora*. [1] Either way the *metzora* is paying for the birds, so what would be the point of the Cohen getting somebody else to bring the birds?

The Gemara, Arachin 15b-16a, lists many sins that caused *tzara'at*. The most well known is lashon hara, but immorality, robbery, bloodshed, false oaths, excessive pride, and selfishness are also offered as possibilities. By declaring someone a *metzora*, the Cohen in effect was telling him that he has committed an extremely serious sin, and sentenced him to excommunication. The afflicted would live outside the camp and take on practices associated with mourning, wearing torn garments and not shaving (13:45-46). Ibn Ezra explains that the *metzora* is mourning for himself and lamenting his evil deeds that brought him to this awful state.

This is why it is important for the Cohen to send someone to purchase the birds for the *metzora*. The Cohen declared this *metzora* a sinner, now he performs a gesture to help the *metzora* become pure again, by helping to get the necessary birds. The Cohen is showing us how to deal with a person who has strayed outside of society and is now ready to return. The role of the Cohen is not only to condemn and expel the sinner; it is also to help reintegrate the ba'al teshuva into the group.

The purification process included the Cohen applying blood from the sacrifices to the right ear lobe, thumb and big toe of the *metzora* (14:14). Rav Sorotzkin points out that this is the same way the Cohanim were first inaugurated into the priestly service. The idea is that the cohen now treats the purified *metzora* as someone who is the same as he is.

The way that the Cohen acts during the purification of the *metzora* teaches that we need to take an active role, helping those who want to return to Judaism, and as we help them we must keep in mind to treat them with kindness and respect, as our friends and equals.

Shabbat Shalom

[1] See Ibn Ezra 14:4 in the Mossad HaRav Kook Torat Chaim Chumash, footnotes 8 and 9.