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## A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

### פרשת תזריע - מצורע

זאת תהיה תורת המצרע ביום טהרתו וכו'. וצנה הפהן ולקח למטהר... ועץ ארז ושני תולעת ואזב. (ויקרא יד, ב-ד)  
*This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification... The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified shall be taken... cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop.* (Vayikra 14:2-4)

This week's *Sidrah* focuses on how an individual afflicted with *tzara'as* can achieve purification. The unique process for the *metzora* allows him to cleanse himself from impurity and seek atonement. The first step involves bringing two birds, cedar wood, crimson wool, and hyssop.

Rashi explains the symbolic meaning of these items in the purification process. Since pride is the underlying cause for *tzara'as*, עץ ארז - cedarwood is brought. The cedar, which grows tall, imposing, and wide, serves as a reminder to the sinner that he held himself high and important. What, then, is the remedy for the *metzora*? He must humble himself, lowering his arrogance like a תולעת (worm) and like the אזב (hyssop). The crimson wool, dyed with the blood of a tiny worm, along with the hyssop, a humble bush, both symbolise the penitent's newfound humility.

The Gur Aryeh questions why two items are necessary to represent the modesty required of the *metzora*. Why isn't he simply commanded to bring the symbol that signifies the most extreme humility?

He answers that the *metzora* must undergo two stages of humility in the process of his *teshuvah*. Since he sinned out of arrogance, he must first go to the opposite extreme. This initial step is crucial; without it, he may easily slip back into his former sinful ways. Once he has reached this level of rectification, he can then adjust his behaviour to a more balanced approach, as extremes in conduct are never appropriate. Accordingly, the *possuk* first mentions the תולעת because, at the outset, the *metzora* must humble himself to a great extent, akin to the worm. Only after achieving this extreme humility can he modify his demeanour somewhat to resemble the hyssop, which is not as lowly as the worm.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* offers an alternative explanation based on his understanding of the Rambam's opinion. The Rambam (*Hilchos Deos 2:3*) notes that there are certain modes of conduct where an individual cannot adopt a halfway approach; instead, one must go to an extreme. Amongst these traits is arrogance, where mere modesty is insufficient, and one must demonstrate an extreme level of humility. Additionally, he discusses the trait of anger, asserting that a person should distance themselves from anger in the most extreme manner.

However, the Lechem Mishnah questions this ruling by referencing another statement from the Rambam that appears to contradict the earlier directive. Elsewhere (*Hilchos Deos 1:4-5*), the Rambam states that an individual should always conduct themselves with balance, avoiding any extremes in behaviour. He advises that while a person should not be easily angered, they should not be devoid of any emotion either. Instead, anger should only be expressed when absolutely necessary. Regarding humility, the Rambam advises that one does not need to be excessively humble, but rather should maintain a moderate level of humility. This raises the question: how does this fit with the Rambam's other statement that extremism is required for certain *middos*?

The Rosh Yeshiva suggests that enhancing one's character traits requires two essential elements from a person: practical conduct and inner feelings. Since רחמנא לבא בעי – Hashem desires our heart - it is not sufficient to simply act with good *middos*; one must also internalise and cultivate those positive traits. For example, the Torah states regarding *tzedakah*: כִּי יְהִי בְךָ אֲבִיּוֹן וְכוּ', לֹא תִאֲמָץ אֶת לִבְבְּךָ וְכוּ'. נָתַן תִּתֵּן. לֹא יִרְע לִבְבְּךָ בְּתִתְּךָ לוֹ *heart*... You shall surely give him, and let your **heart** not feel bad when you give him (Devarim 15:7,10). The Torah calls on a person to not only give generously but also cultivate compassion for the poor and less fortunate.

We find further reference to these two areas of growth in an insight from R' Yisroel Salanter (*Kochavei Ohr* 5). There are two distinct teachings, derived from different sources in the Gemara, that address how a person should emulate Hashem's ways. The Gemara (*Sotah* 14a) cites the *possuk*, אַחֲרֵי ה' אֶלְקֵיכֶם, תִּלְכוּ, You shall follow, Hashem, your G-d (Devarim 13:5), to demonstrate that just as Hashem dresses the unclothed, visits the sick, consoles the mourners, and buries the dead, so too should a person follow in His ways and perform these actions. Additionally, the Gemara (*Shabbos* 133b) derives from the word וְאֲנִי הוֹדֵיו, I will glorify Him (*Shemos* 15:2), that just as Hashem is merciful and gracious, a person should also possess these traits. R' Yisroel notes that these two lessons seem repetitive, raising the question of why we need this double teaching from different sources.

R' Yisroel explains that these two principles address different stages in an individual's personal growth. Initially, one should engage in the outward motions of imitating Hashem, even if internally they struggle with negative *middos*. This is the first teaching, which encourages acting in the same way as Hashem - by clothing the poor, visiting the sick, and so on. However, this initial stage is not sufficient; more is expected from us. We are required to cultivate positive traits within ourselves and work on changing our negative tendencies. In this way, too, we must strive to be like Hashem by embodying a nature that is merciful and gracious to others.

With this background, the Rosh Yeshiva explains that the two statements of the Rambam pertain to different aspects of *middos*. When the Rambam advised moderation in all traits, he was referring to a person's internal feelings, which should ideally be balanced. However, when he advocated for extremity, he was speaking about one's outward behaviour. Specifically, concerning anger and humility, he instructs individuals to conduct themselves with the highest levels of humility and patience.

This explanation also addresses the difficulty raised by the Gur Aryeh regarding the necessity of two symbols of humility. A person who has sinned out of arrogance requires a dual approach to rectify their behaviour; they must improve both their outward actions and their internal feelings. Consequently, they bring a תולעת, which signifies the most extreme form of humility required outward behaviour. Additionally, they bring hyssop, which represents a milder form of humility, symbolising the more moderate inner feelings a person should cultivate.

We can learn from the lesson that improving our *middos* requires attention in two areas. Not only should we work on enhancing our outward behaviour, but we must also cultivate and nurture our inner feelings to align with those of Hashem.

This Devar Torah is adapted from ספר וענפיה ארזי אל and is presented by the Gateshead Yeshiva Alumni Association. To receive by email, please register your interest by sending an email to [parshasheet@yvalumni.org](mailto:parshasheet@yvalumni.org).