



Parashat Naso
Rabbi David Silverberg

Among the laws presented in Parashat Naso is that of *shilu'ach teme'ei'im*, which forbids those who have contracted *tum'a* (ritual impurity) to enter certain sacred areas. *Temei'ei meit*, those have come in contact with a dead body, are barred from area of the *Beit Ha-mikdash* itself, whereas people have become *tamei* (impure) as a result of bodily emissions may not even tread upon the Temple Mount. Finally, those afflicted with the *tzara'at* skin discoloration are forbidden from entering the city of Jerusalem until they have undergone the prescribed process of purification.

Maimonides lists this restriction in his *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* as the thirty-first *mitzvat asei* (affirmative command), where he writes:

The thirty-first command is that which He commanded us to keep those who are impure away from the camp, and this is what is meant when He...said, "They shall send away from the camp every person with *tzara'at* and everybody with a bodily emission," and this "camp" refers to the camp of the *Shekhina*, outside of which are the chambers of the [Temple] courtyard...

Curiously, Maimonides interprets the verse in Parashat Naso ("They shall send away..." – 5:2) as referring specifically to the *machaneh Shekhina*, "the camp of the Divine Presence," or the area of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. Yet, Maimonides himself, in *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhhot Bi'at Mikdash, chapter 3), explicitly codifies the three categories of *temei'im* enumerated above, who are barred from different areas. As we saw, certain *temei'im* are barred not only from the actual area of the *Mikdash*, but also from the Temple Mount or the entire city of Jerusalem. Why, then, does Maimonides choose to interpret the term "camp" in this verse as referring specifically to the "camp of the *Shekhina*," if in truth it refers to different "camps" with respect to the different categories of *temei'im*? (This question was raised by the *Kesef Mishneh*, Hilkhhot Bi'at Mikdash 3:10.)

Rav Avraham Binyamin Zilberberg of Pittsburgh, in his *Hadrat Melekh* commentary to *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* (1945), suggested that Maimonides indeed defined this prohibition in terms of distancing these groups of people from the actual Temple. Although the groups of *zavim* (people who experienced bodily emissions) and *metzora'im* (people with *tzara'at*) are barred – respectively – even from the Temple Mount and Jerusalem, these restrictions essentially relate to these people's distance from the *Mikdash*. The Torah did not forbid *metzora'im* from Jerusalem per se, but rather demanded that they remain at a considerable distance from the Temple, and not enter even within the city in which the Temple is situated. The Torah's intent is not to bar the *metzora* from the city, but rather to keep him far away from the *Mikdash*. Similarly, a *zav* is forbidden from ascending the Temple Mount only insofar as he would thereby come within a close distance of the Temple itself. The prohibition is thus defined not as

forbidding his treading upon the Temple Mount, but rather as requiring that he keep at a distance from the site of the *Mikdash*.

Hence, Maimonides understandably interpreted this verse as requiring all *temei'im* to keep away from the *machaneh Shekhina*. This prohibition indeed applies to all three groups, though some are required to keep a greater distance than others.

This definition of the law of *shilu'ach temei'im* perhaps requires that we reexamine the unique status of the *metzora* in this regard. *Tzara'at* is commonly associated with the violation of *lashon ha-ra* – gossip and slander – and thus the *metzora* is banished from all walled cities, from the centers of social activity, as punishment for his social misconduct. Instinctively, we might have viewed the *metzora's* banishment from Jerusalem as merely a natural outgrowth of this restriction, a measure intended to keep him away from the major "hubs" of social activity. In light of what we have seen, however, the *metzora's* banishment from Jerusalem relates to the distance the Torah demands between him and the *machaneh Shekhina*. He is barred not only from social activity, but also from the nation's center of religious life, from the representative "residence" of the *Shekhina*, from which he must remain at even a greater distance than that imposed upon other *temei'im*.

The Torah might be alluding to us through this *halakha* that nothing stands in such stark contrast to the *Shekhina*, to the religious ideal that *Benei Yisrael* are to strive, as social misconduct, speaking negatively and derisively about other people. The other categories of *tum'a* perhaps represent other spiritual ills that are likewise incompatible with the Divine Presence, but the *metzora* is driven further away from these other groups. Our very first responsibility as a nation is to uphold the values of social justice and mutual respect, and thus the neglect of these values is especially inconsonant with the ideal represented by the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.