



Parashat Metzora 2008
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Parashat Metzora continues the Torah's discussion of the laws of *tzara'at*, various forms of discoloration that cause *tum'a* (ritual purity). One of the topics addressed in Parashat Metzora is *tzara'at ha-bayit*, discoloration that would surface on the wall of a person's home, warranting, in some cases, the dismantling of the entire home. The Torah writes that when a person discovers the mark on his wall, he should approach a *kohen* and declare, "*Ke-nega nir'a li ba-bayit*" – "The likeness of an infection appeared to me in the home" (14:35). The Mishna (Nega'im 12:5) understands this verse as requiring that the homeowner present the information in an uncertain manner. Even if the individual happens to have expertise in this area of *Halakha* and knows for certain that the discoloration qualifies as *tzara'at ha-bayit*, he should nevertheless report only "the likeness of an infection." He should not declare unequivocally that a *tzara'at* infection has surfaced on his wall.

Maimonides codifies this *halakha* in *Hilkhot Tum'at Tzara'at* (14:4), amidst his presentation of the laws concerning *tzara'at ha-bayit*. A number of writers raised the question of whether or not Maimonides intended to restrict this provision to specifically this context. As noted by the *Ma'aseh Rokei'ach* commentary, the omission of this *halakha* from the rest of Maimonides' discussion of *tzara'at* would certainly imply that it applies only here, with regard to *tzara'at ha-bayit*. When it comes to the other forms of *tzara'at*, it would appear, the Torah does not dictate the manner in which the stricken individual should approach the *kohen*. If he feels confident that the discoloration indeed constitutes a *tzara'at* infection, he may indeed state definitively that he suffers from *tzara'at*. (He must still approach a *kohen*, since only a *kohen's* formal declaration effectuates the status of impurity associated with *tzara'at*.)

Alternatively, however, one might contend that this *halakha* indeed applies, in principle, to all forms of *tzara'at*, but as a practical matter, it obtains only in the context of *tzara'at ha-bayit*. When a person discovers a suspicious spot on his body or garment, he approaches the *kohen* and shows him the discoloration; he does not have to first approach the *kohen* to report the discovery and invite him to inspect the mark. It is only in the case of *tzara'at ha-bayit* that the individual must first approach a *kohen* to report the discovery of a suspicious mark, since in this case he obviously cannot bring the mark to the *kohen*. Practically speaking, then, it is only in this instance that the Torah dictates the manner in which the person reports the information to the *kohen*.

In any event, if we do wish to distinguish between *tzara'at ha-bayit* and other manifestations of *tzara'at* in this regard, we might point to the Talmud's comment in *Masekhet Yoma* (11b) that views *tzara'at ha-bayit* as a heavenly response to *tzarut ayin* – stinginess. A person who displays an exaggerated sense of entitlement, to the extent that he refuses to share his belongings with others, is subjected to the humiliating and aggravating process of *tzara'at ha-bayit*. Possibly, this educational process begins with

the individual's confession to the *kohen*, "The likeness of an infection appeared to me." As he begins to engender within himself a greater sense of humility and respect for other people, he is told to speak in an uncertain manner, to recognize the possibility of error and misjudgment, rather than arrogantly presume definitive knowledge. The first step towards respecting the needs, concerns and opinions of others is to acknowledge one's own fallibility, and to realize that his perceptions and conclusions may not always be definitively correct. The training thus begins with the word *ke-nega* – "the likeness of an infection" – whereby the individual expresses a degree of self-doubt and acknowledges the limits of his knowledge and judgment.