

**DVAR TORAH HUMBLE AS A HYSSOP**

The *metzora* – the arrogant sinner smitten with a supernatural plague – goes through an elaborate purification process that includes *tolat shani* – red thread – and *eizov* – hyssop (a lowly plant that grows wild in the hills of Israel). Rashi (Vayikra 14:4) quotes the Midrash: “The *metzora* who was arrogant should now lower himself like the worm (*tolat* also means a worm in Hebrew) and the hyssop.” Question: Why does he need the props – the red thread and hyssop? Why can't we just tell him to become humble – why must he become “humble as a hyssop”?

First, think about the following story: It is told that **Rabbi Akiva Eiger** and **Rabbi Yaakov of Lisa, the “Nesivos”**, two of the 18th century's greatest Torah personalities - leaders, scholars, and saints - were both in a carriage approaching a large city. Throngs of people came to greet the tzaddikim, and, as was the custom in that era, unhitched the horses, and pulled the carriage themselves. Rabbi Akiva Eiger saw the great honor shown by the people of the city to his friend, snuck out of the wagon, and joined the procession – but so did the the Nesivos! When they reached the city the crowd was surprised to find an empty carriage.

The 21st century reader asks, “Didn't both of them realize that the crowds were honoring both of them?” and is shocked and awed to hear, “No, they did not; they simply thought the crowds were honoring their friend. Their humility was genuine and straightforward.”

The simple humility of those brilliant sages sheds light on our Rashi. The recovering *metzora* must not just become humble, but must become as naturally humble as the hyssop. The hyssop and worm are lowly as G-d made them, without thinking about being lowly.

But how is it possible for the great and successful to not recognize their greatness? The answer is to flip the question – How is it possible for them **not** to realize that everything a person has and has achieved comes from G-d? How can they not be as humble as a hyssop?



Shapell's student Steve Perlín (middle) soon begins service in the Israeli armed forces. Here he is with Roshei Yeshiva Rabbi Yitzchak Hirshfeld (left) and Rabbi Shaya Kartinsky (right), and gifts - including a pocket Mishnah Brurah) at the office send-off party.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT KING UZIAHU'S LEPROSY

A number of characters in Tanach were smitten with *tzara'at*: Naaman the general and Geichazi (Melachim-Kings II 5), the four lepers outside the gates of Shomron (Melachim II 7), and King Uziahu (Melachim II 15, Divrei Hayamim-Chronicles II 26). We will focus on learning about, and learning from King Uziahu's *tzara'at*.

### WHO WAS KING UZIAHU?

King Uziahu (also referred to as Azariah), was one of the righteous kings of Yehudah, the southern kingdom. He was the tenth generation from the line of King David, was the son of King Amatziah and the father of King Yotam. He lived during the time of the prophets Zechariah, Yeshayah, Hoshea, and Amos. **But he met a surprising end** (verse 5).

#### Melachim II 15:1-7

1. In the twenty-seventh year of Yaravam the king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amatziah the king of Yehudah became king.
2. He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem, and his mother's name was Yechaliahu of Jerusalem.
3. And he did what was right in the eyes of Hashem, like all that Amatziah his father did.
4. However, the bamot altars were not removed; the people were still slaughtering sacrifices and burning incense on the bamot.
5. **And Hashem brought a plague upon the king, and he was stricken with *tzara'at* until the day of his death**, and he lived in a "free" house, and Yotam the king's son, who was appointed over the palace, judged the people of the land.
6. And the rest of the events of Azariah and all that he did, are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Yehudah.
7. And Azariah slept with his forefathers, and they buried him with his forefathers in the city of David, and Yotam his son reigned in his stead.

### WHY WAS HE SMITTEN WITH TZARA'AT?

King Uziahu's success as a military and economic leader is elaborated on in **Divrei Hayamim**, but so is the episode of his *tzara'at*:

#### Divrei Hayamim II 26:16-21

16. And when he became powerful, his heart became haughty until he became corrupt, and he sinned against Hashem his G-d, and he came into Hashem's Temple to burn incense on the incense altar.
17. And Azariahu the kohen came after him,

and with him were priests of Hashem, eighty mighty

#### מלכים ב' טו:א-ז

- (א) בְּשָׁנָה עֶשְׂרִים וְשִׁבְעֵי שָׁנָה לִירְבֵּעַם מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל מֶלֶךְ עֲזַרְיָה בֶן אֲמֻצַּיָה מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה:
- (ב) בֶּן שֵׁשׁ עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה הָיָה בְּמָלְכוֹ וְחֲמִשִּׁים וּשְׁתַּיִם שָׁנָה מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם וְשֵׁם אִמּוֹ יְכַלְיָהוּ מִירוּשָׁלַם:
- (ג) וַיַּעַשׂ הַיֵּשֶׁר בְּעֵינֵי ה' כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֲמֻצַּיָהוּ אָבִיו:
- (ד) רַק הַבָּמוֹת לֹא סָרוּ עוֹד הָעָם מִזְבָּחִים וּמִקְטָרִים בַּבָּמוֹת:
- (ה) וַיִּגְזַע ה' אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיְהִי מִצְרַע עַד יוֹם מָתוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּבַיִת הַחֲפְשִׁית וַיּוֹתֵם בֶּן הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל הַבַּיִת שִׁפְט אֶת עַם הָאָרֶץ:
- (ו) וַיִּתֵּר דְּבָרֵי עֲזַרְיָהוּ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הֲלֹא הֵם כְּתוּבִים עַל סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה:
- (ז) וַיִּשְׁכַּב עֲזַרְיָה עִם אֲבֹתָיו וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ עִם אֲבֹתָיו בְּעִיר דָּוִד וַיִּמְלֹךְ יוֹתָם בְּנֹו תַחְתָּיו:

#### דברי הימים ב' כו: טז-כא

- (טז) וַיִּכְחַזְקֵתוּ גְבוּהַ לְבוֹ עַד לְהִשְׁחִית וַיִּמְעַל בַּה' אֶלְקֵינוּ וַיָּבֵא אֶל הַיֵּכָל ה' לְהִקְטִיר עַל מִזְבֵּחַ הַקְּטָרֶת:
- (יז) וַיָּבֵא אַחֲרָיו עֲזַרְיָהוּ הַכֹּהֵן

וַעֲמֹו פְּהֻגִים לָהּ שְׁמוֹנִים בְּנֵי

men.

18. And they stood beside Uzziahu the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziahu, to burn incense to Hashem, but for the kohanim, sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn [incense]. Leave the Sanctuary, for you have sinned, and it will not be glory for you from Hashem the G-d."

19. And Uzziah became furious, and in his hand was a censor to burn, and in his fury with the priests, the *tzara'at* shone upon his forehead before the priests in the House of Hashem, over the incense altar.

20. And Azariah, the chief kohen, and all the kohanim, turned to him, and behold he was stricken with *tzara'at* on his forehead; so they rushed him out of there, and he too hastened to leave, for Hashem had smitten him.

21. And King Uzziah was stricken with *tzara'at* until the day of his death, and he lived in a "free" house, for it had been decreed from the House of Hashem, and Yotam his son was over the king's house; he judged the people of the land.

חיל :

(ח) וַיַּעֲמֵדּוּ עַל עֲזַיְהוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ  
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ לֹא לָךְ עֲזִיָּהוּ לְהִקְטִיר  
לָהּ כִּי לַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן  
הַמִּקְדָּשִׁים לְהִקְטִיר צֶאֱמָן  
הַמִּקְדָּשׁ כִּי מִעֲלֹתָ וְלֹא לָךְ לְכָבוֹד  
מֵה' אֱלֹקִים :

(ט) וַיִּזְעַף עֲזַיְהוּ וּבָיָדוֹ מִקְטָרֶת  
לְהִקְטִיר וּבָזַעְפוֹ עִם הַכֹּהֲנִים  
וַהֲצַרְעַת זָרְחָה בְּמִצְחוֹ לִפְנֵי  
הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּבַיִת ה' מֵעַל לְמִזְבֵּחַ  
הַקְטָרֶת :

(כ) וַיִּפֹּן אֵלָיו עֲזַרְיָהוּ כֹהֵן הָרֹאשׁ  
וְכָל הַכֹּהֲנִים וַהֲנִיחַ הוּא מִצָּרַע  
בְּמִצְחוֹ וַיִּבְהַלּוּהוּ מִשָּׁם וְגַם הוּא  
נִדְחָף לְצֵאת כִּי נִגְעוּ ה' :

(כא) וַיְהִי עֲזַיְהוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ מִצָּרַע עַד  
יוֹם מוֹתוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב בַּיִת הַחִפְשִׁית  
מִצָּרַע כִּי נִגְזַר מִבַּיִת ה' וַיּוֹתֵם בְּנֵו  
עַל בַּיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ שׁוֹפֵט אֶת עַם  
הָאָרֶץ :

### But why should this result in *tzara'at* appearing on King Uzziahu's head?

Here are two answers – one from the **Midrash** and another from the **Ramchal**:

**Midrash Tanchuma Metzora 4:** ... *Tzara'at* comes upon a person as a result of eleven different things: On idolatry, on desecrating the Divine Name, on forbidden sexual relations, on thefts, on *lashon hara* – speaking negatively about another ... on one who enters a realm that is not his ... What is the source for this? It is from Uzziahu, who entered the realm of Kehunah – priesthood, as it says, "*Tzara'at* shone upon his forehead." ...

### Think about the following:

1. Why did King Uzziahu want to serve as a Kohen? (see also Tanchuma Noach 13)
2. How might his successes (see Divrei Hayamim II 26:2-15) be related to his tragic end?
3. Where might "entering a realm that is not ours" apply to our own lives?
4. How might the speaker of *lashon hara* also "enter a realm that is not his"?
5. To enrich your understanding of King Uzziahu's leprosy you might also want to learn two more midrashim: **Vayikra Rabbah 16:1** and **Tanchuma Metzora 3**.

**The Ramchal's commentary on Bamidbar Parshat Korach:** "... Through this we can understand the episode of Uzziahu, why 'tzara'at shone upon his forehead' because he wanted to offer incense. For the Kohen is connected with Chesed – lovingkindness. And someone who wants to enter a realm that is not his, and do the service of the Kohen, flaws Chesed and hides its light. The reaction is that Gevurah comes and exacts extremely strict judgment. That brought about *tzara'at*, which is extremely strict judgment, as is explained by the Zohar ..."

**TORAH FROM OUR FACULTY**

**OR HANER – BY THE LIGHT OF THE CANDLE, BY RABBI MENDEL FARBER**

The first Mishnah of Pesachim opens, "On the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> (of Nisan) we check for chametz by the light of a candle, *l'or haner*." There might be a profound significance to the combination of the two words *or* and *ner*. We find in Mishlei (6:23), "*Ki ner mitzvah v'Torah or*" – "For a mitzvah (commandment) is a candle and the Torah is light," and the Gemara (Sotah 21a) compares a mitzvah to a candle, but Torah to light. The mitzvot are physical, limited expressions of Hashem's ideal, whereas the Torah is the transcendent ideal itself. The transcendent ideal penetrates the physical exterior through the mitzvot. By utilizing our physical world to perform divine acts (mitzvot) the physical world is refined and its essence, the ideal itself, is revealed. The Divine light embedded in the Torah that we learn shines through the mitzvot we do. That is called the "*or haner*."

What's the difference between *chametz* and *matzah*? *Chametz* is dough that has fermented. Dough left unbaked will naturally begin to ferment. In other words, dough that was affected by natural forces is *chametz*. We correspond to that *chametz* if we permit ourselves to be affected and dominated by natural forces. But to make *matzah* we must zealously work the dough to prevent the natural forces from dominating.



Rabbi Mendel Farber

We eat *matzah* during Pesach when we were freed from domination by natural forces.

To seek the areas dominated by nature within ourselves and within our homes we must use not the *ner* alone but the *or haner*, the inner light of the mitzvot – namely, the Torah we learn. Only the light that reveals the internal essential force of existence frees us from dominance by the external natural forces. As Chazal tell us (Avot 6:3): "The only free man is one involved in Torah." Perhaps this is what is hinted at in "checking for *chametz l'or haner*." The purpose of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, the Exodus from Egypt was the giving of the Torah, *Matan Torah*. We were plucked from the clutches of *Mitzrayim* so that the ultimate spark of freedom could be planted in us at *Matan Torah*. Let us strengthen that spark within us through our learning Torah and thereby merit the final redemption from all those forces from within and from without seeking to destroy us.

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This issue is dedicated in loving memory of  
Shmuel ben Harav Zevulun z"l  
& Chana bat Moshe Binyamin z"l

