



Adapted from the sefer חמין במוצאי שבת a collection of maamarim on
תנא דבי אליהו given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Melave Malka

Melave Malka Parshas Tazria 5763

In Maseches Moed Katan (14b), Chazal explain that in the *pasuk* וְהִצְרִיעַ אֶשֶׁר בּוֹ הַנֶּגַע (Vayikra 13/45), the word וְהִצְרִיעַ comes to include the *Kohen Gadol* in all of the *halachos* that apply to a *metzora*. In other words, despite his status, if a *Kohen Gadol* becomes a *metzora*, he needs to tear his clothes, (something that he is usually forbidden to do), and is sent out of the camp, to sit alone and proclaim to all that he is *tamei*.

This *halacha* teaches us two fundamental lessons. The *kohen* who is appointed to the position of *Kohen Gadol* is supposed to be greater than all of his fellow *kohanim* in beauty, strength, and Torah knowledge. He is elevated to a level of *kedusha* beyond that of other Jews, and lives a separate life of *kedusha*, focusing on perfecting his *midos* to the extent that he will be prepared to enter the *kodesh hakadoshim* once a year, on Yom Kippur, and perform the *avodah* that only he is qualified to perform.

Nonetheless, if that same *Kohen Gadol* is afflicted with *tzaraas*, it must be that he spoke *lashon hara* about another Jew. Because the *Kohen Gadol* has reached very high spiritual levels, we can assume that if he spoke *lashon hara*, it must have been about a very different type of Jew. He probably mentioned the wrongdoing of a sinner, and denigrated him. If it were up to us, we would probably decide that the *Kohen Gadol's* wrongdoing should be overlooked, and that he shouldn't be subject to the laws of the *metzora* like any other Jew. At the very least, we would assume that his *kavod* should not be minimized by forcing him to leave the camp and sit with other *metzoraim*, calling out "*Tamei Tamei*", warning people to stay away from his *tumah*.



[1]

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We would refer to the many *halachos* that require us to be careful to honor *kohanim*. The Rambam (*Hilchos Klei Hamikdash* 4/1-2) writes “Each person in Yisrael must treat them (the *kohanim*) with great *kavod*, to give them priority in any matter of *kedushah*, to read the Torah first, to recite the *brachah* first, and to take a superior portion before anyone else.

The requirement to honor the *Kohen Gadol* goes much further. The Rambam writes, “The Kohen Gadol is required to behave with *kavod*, and not to treat himself lightly among other Jews. None should see him naked in the bathhouse or in the bathroom, or when cutting his hair... He should not enter *beis hamishteh*, or a public *seudah*, even if they are celebrations of *mitzvah*... if he knows testimony, he is not required to testify, even before the *Beis Din Hagadol*, for it is not *kavod* for him to go and testify”

This would certainly lead us to believe that we should treat the *Kohen Gadol* leniently if he is afflicted with *tzaraas*. We would want to uphold his *kavod*, and certainly avoid shaming him publicly. We can only imagine how many busybodies wouldn't be able to resist going to see the famous and revered *Kohen Gadol* sitting in torn clothes calling out *tamei tamei!*

By adding a word that specifically includes the *Kohen Gadol* in every aspect of the *metzora* process, the Torah teaches us, that even the most revered and exalted Jew who speaks *lashon hara* about the lowest simplest Jew must receive the full punishment describe in the Torah. There can be no leniencies, even for the *Kohen Gadol*.

However, with this same *halacha* the Torah teaches us another vital lesson. Even though the Kohen Gadol who is a *metzora* must suffer the humiliation of banishment like any other *metzora*, he is not disqualified from returning to serve as *Kohen Gadol*. When he finishes the process, brings his *korbanos* and becomes *tahor*, he resumes his position and we are required to honor him just as we did in the past.



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Here too, without the guidance of the Torah, we may have thought that he should have been disqualified from ever returning to serve as *Kohen Gadol*.

We need to learn and apply both of these lessons, because we tend to err in both directions. When a respected person does something wrong, we ignore his wrongdoing or take steps to “cover it up”. This is certainly incorrect. Everyone makes mistakes, and there is no *tzadik* who does only good and never sins. His many good deeds, don’t cancel out, or cover his wrongdoings. He is destined to be judged for every improper action.

On the other hand, people often ceaselessly persecute someone who has sinned. They constantly remind him of his crime, remove him from any positions he has held, and never let him return. They refuse to acknowledge his ability to do *teshuvah*. This overreaction is also mistaken. They forget that everyone is capable of wrongdoing, and even someone who had truly achieved high *madreigos*, is able to fall.

We must follow the path prescribed by the Torah. Good deeds should be rewarded, and wrongdoing must be punished. Good behavior doesn’t cancel out negative behavior, but negative behavior also doesn’t cancel the good. The *parsha* of *metzora* teaches us to adopt and internalize the ways of the Torah that has been passed on us from generation to generation, apply its lessons to each situation in life, and serve Hashem
בלב ונפש חפצה כל הימים אכ"ר



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