



# Another Man's Dishes

רמב"ם הלכות טומאת צרעת פ"ט ה"ח

When a blemish appears on a bridegroom, he is given all seven days of celebration. Similarly, if a blemish appears on his garments or his home, it is not inspected until after the seven days of his celebration. Similarly, during a festival, he is given all the days of the festival before an inspection is made, as indicated by [Vayikra 14:36]: "And the priest shall give a command and they will empty the home." Now if the Torah postponed the matter for the sake of concerns that are merely permitted, i.e. so that one's utensils not be deemed impure, the inference can certainly be made, that judgment should be postponed for a mitzvah.

חתן שגראָה בו נגע נותנין לו כל שבעת ימי המשטה. וכן אם נראה בבגדיו או בביתו אין רואין אותו עד לאחר המשטה. וכן פרקל נותנין לו כל ימות הרקל ששנאמר (ויקרא יד לו) "וצנה הכהן ופננו את הבית" וגו' אם המתנה תורה לדבר הרשות שלא יטמאו כליו כל וחקר לדבר מצוה:

*This month we conclude the section in Rambam dealing with the laws of lesions, tzara'as. In perek 9, halacha 8, the Rambam paskens a halacha that the Rebbe calls an incredible teaching, a hora'ah nifla'ah:*

## THE MEANING OF TZARA'AS

At the end of Hilchos Tumas Tzara'as, the Rambam explains that *tzara'as* is not a medical allergy but a miraculous biblical affliction administered to a person who caused division and discord among Jews with his slanderous gossip.

Accordingly, the punishment and part of the rectification for this impurity is to be sent outside the Jewish encampment, in total isolation.

The only person who has the authority and legitimacy to declare someone a *metzora*, is the Kohen. Kohanim stand out among the Jewish people with their loving kindness. The magnitude of ostracization from family and community will not be lost on a person imbued with compassion. He can be trusted to delay judgment until beyond all doubt. When he finally does pronounce a person as impure, you can be sure the person must have deserved it.

Just as the *tzara'as* warrants such a severe outcome when found on a person's body, the same can be said when the lesions are discovered on the walls of a person's home.

## THE LAWS OF A HOME WITH TZARA'AS

There is a three week period in which the house in question is placed in quarantine. The Kohen comes to the house and inspects the lesion. If it fits the specific criteria, he calls for a quarantine and everything inside the home is deemed impure.

The Kohen can make up to three trips from that point on, depending on

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 הרה"ת ר' יצחק ישראל  
 וזוגתו מרת רחל בריינא  
 בניהם ובנותיהם  
 מנחם מענדל, שרה רבקה,  
 חנה פרימט ריקל, יהושע דוד שיחיו  
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the status of the lesion. He comes back on the seventh, the thirteenth, and the nineteenth days. The seventh day and the thirteenth day are both counted as seventh to the previous six days, and first to the next six days. The most severe outcome is that the entire house is demolished.

This happens in either of two scenarios:

1. On the seventh day the Kohen notices the lesion has gotten bigger. In such a circumstance the afflicted stones are removed, the house plastered with mortar, and a second quarantine enacted. If the lesion has returned on the thirteenth, the house is destroyed.
2. If when the Kohen returns on the seventh day the lesion has retained its same identity as day one, neither spreading nor diminishing, the house is placed in its second week of quarantine. On day 13 the Kohen reexamines the lesion and if it is either as before or it expands, he must remove the stones where the lesion was, and plaster the house with mortar. If on day 19 the lesion reappears, the house is demolished.

The lesions that appear on the walls of a person's home announce the status of the homeowner. They

are screaming from the rooftops. Like when Moshiach comes, when the stolen stones that were used to build a home will decry their fate to those around them.

The *tzara'as* on a person's body, on a home or on clothes, tell us what kind of person we are dealing with—someone that is suspect to such a harsh state of impurity. Isolation from family, community, and people, is a punishment given only in very unique situations.

But at this point the Rambam tells us something incredible.

### EARTHENWARE VS. METAL

The homeowner who discovered the lesions on his walls is instructed to return home and clean out his house. The Kohen waits outside and does not go to inspect the lesion. If the Kohen were to administer a quarantine for this house, everything that is in the house will immediately become impure.

Rashi asks, which items is Torah concerned about becoming impure? Gold, silver, diamonds, rubies? What is the Torah out to protect?

His answer is that it wasn't even about metal pots and pans. Metal items can just be put in a *mikveh* and they will be fit to use again. The only items that once impure, can never be used by the homeowner when he returns to a state of purity are earthenware vessels.

Earthenware vessels are inexpensive objects, yet the Torah goes out of its way to save them. With this *din*, Rambam demonstrates to us the value Torah places on a Jew's *gashmius*, no matter what situation he may find himself in.

In fact this is the source for the general rule that Torah cares for a Jew's property.

### YIDDISHE GASHMIUS

Applying this to our own lives provides us with the important reminder of how much we must care about another Jew's *gashmius*. Additionally, we learn how much we have to value and care about our own *gashmius*, and what one penny can accomplish, when used for Torah and mitzvos, or given to tzedakah.

Parenthetically, in this *halacha* we can also see what might happen to the homeowner with the lesions when he witnesses Torah's attitude towards him. Here is a person suspect of such a harsh state of impurity, and yet Torah is concerned that perhaps his earthenware vessel will become unusable. We therefore tell the Kohen to wait outside and not come in until the owner is able to save his vessels. When he witnesses this compassion it will surely cause him to clean out his house in a spiritual sense from all negative things. **1**

(Adapted from *sichas* 29 Elul 5746. *Yein Malchus* p. 487)