

Teachings of the Maharal

The Hyssop and the Worm

Vayikra 14:4 - And the Kohen shall command, and for the person being purified of tzoraat [a spiritual skin disease] shall be taken two live, pure birds, cedar wood, and a strip of wool dyed red with a worm-derived dye.

Rashi - : What shall correct him so that he will be healed? He should lower himself from his arrogance like a worm and like a hyssop.

Gur Arye - Why these particular two lowly species, worm and hyssop? First, he must lower himself to be like a worm, which is very lowly indeed, in order that he distance himself from transgression, for in the first place, he sinned with arrogance. Without becoming very humble he will not escape his sin, and his arrogance will return. First, he must be very lowly like the worm, then he can take on a lesser lowliness like the hyssop. The sequence is important, for the extreme lowliness is therapeutic and temporary, and the lesser lowliness is the proper humility that is the moderate way between the two extremes.

The prophet says, " Do not fear, o worm of Yaakov [Yishayahu 41:14]. Gur Arye , Num. 21:34: This refers to the power of Israel which is separate and elevated from the physical, for they cleave to Him,

for their preciousness is not a physical thing. Therefore, Israel is described in its smallness "worm of Yaakov", very small and shorn of physicality. It is too small for its body to have power- its power is its mouth. Rambam says in the Eight Chapters, fourth chapter: Humility is midway between arrogance and depression. The middle way is praiseworthy. It is possible that excesses or deficiencies result in illness of the soul which must be healed the way a bodily illness is healed, with countermeasures that restore moderation.

MDK - Arrogance is the root of all sin, and the less one has of it, the more likely he will do Hashem's will. If he knows his true place as Hashem's servant, it would not occur to him to oppose His will. The first step in repentance is confession, which negates arrogance. This is the lesson of the hyssop and the worm.

Vayikra 14:35 - And the owner of the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, "Something like a plague appeared to me in the house."

Rashi - : Even if he were wise and knew for certain... *Column prepared by Dr. Moshe Kuhr*