

From the Abravanel Jacob Solomon

After the kohen declared that the tzaraat was healed, the metzora brought offerings, including the asham (guilt offering):

The kohen shall take [from the metzora] the one lamb and offer it as an asham, a guilt offering, with the log of oil... (14:12)

The main part of Tazria-Metzora is about the plague of tzaraat. R. Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that tzaraat is not 'leprosy' as we understand it, but a Divinely-imposed sign of moral deficiency. The K'li Yakar (on 13:2) divides the spiritual causes of tzaraat into three groups:

1. Lashon Hara, as with Miriam's report about Moshe's domestic life (Bamidar 12:10).

2. Gasut Ru'ach, haughtiness of spirit, as with Naaman. "Naaman, the chief officer of the King of Aram was a great man before his master" (Melachim Bet 5:1), is understood by the K'li Yakar as to mean that he conducted himself in an arrogant manner.

3. Chemdat Mamon, greed for money: Elisha had cured Naaman from tzaraat. Naaman offered Elisha payment, but he refused to accept. Gehazi, Elisha's student chased after Naaman and took the payment for himself. He was punished with tzaraat (Melachim Bet 5:27).

Common to all groups is small-mindedness. Such individuals feel ill-will towards the situation and possessions of others.

Indeed the terse, parallel passage on tzaraat recounted by Moshe before his death to the Israelites emphasizes the moral, rather than the detailed-technical side of tzaraat:

Beware of the affliction of tzaraat ...do everything according to the instructions of the kohen. Remember what G-d... did to Miriam on your journey's way from Egypt (D'varim 24:8-9).

Abravanel emphasizes that the metzora consulted the kohen, not the doctor. Tzaraat is not a medical condition, but a spiritual condition. The kohen's training included expertise in tumah and tahara: what was spiritually pure and compatible with contact with various levels of kedusha, and what was spiritually unclean and thus incompatible with kedusha.

That tzaraat is essentially a spiritual condition indicating G-d's displeasure at the way the individual interacted with others is also reflected with the details of the asham metzora. The Torah details that blood from the asham was placed on the physical extremities (earlobe, thumb, big toe) of the newly-healed metzora. Abravanel observes that this was blatantly the

opposite of traditional medical practice of reducing blood, blood-letting. Here blood was not reduced, but added. This Torah-ordained practice, explains Abravanel, was to indicate that tzaraat was not to be attributed to anything physical, but entirely spiritual. The oil, a substance symbolizing wisdom, was similarly applied, the left-overs being placed on the person's head, in line with "May your head never lack oil" (Kohelet 9:8). That emphasized that the tzaraat had occurred because of the need for wisdom and consideration in attitude and behaviour towards other people.

Perhaps the message in our situation is clear. When unexpected and unpleasant things occur, people should not only check their mezuzot, but also review the way they think about and behave towards other people, making a wholehearted effort to put past things right where possible, being more careful in speech and deed towards others in the future. 🙏