

Parshat Metzora

Metzora begins with God speaking to Moses saying, “This shall be the ritual for a leper (a Metzora) at the time that he is to be cleansed...”

Any person with almost any skin disease was called a metzora, a leper. Of course most skin diseases were not leprosy. If the skin disease lasted a long time the person was declared a metzora and was unclean and sent to live outside of the community. Once a person was declared a metzora the priests had to examine the person. This parsha gives the laws and rituals that guide the priests.

Some Israelites worked as professional healers working with home remedies, much like an allergist would today. Sunlight was the biggest healing agent.

The ritual of the first day was very mysterious. The ceremony included: taking two live clean birds, cedar wood, crimson yarn, and hyssop. The priest would have one of the birds slaughtered over fresh water in an earthen vessel. The priest then takes the live bird along with the cedar wood, crimson yarn and hyssop and mixes them together. Then the priest takes the live bird and dips the live bird in this mixture along with blood from the dead bird. The priest then sprinkles the metzora seven times and then sets the live bird free in the county side.

This ritual was seen as a magical transference. Jews through out history have used this idea of transference in many different ways. On the day before Rosh Hashannah or Yom Kippur - Kaparot is performed. Kaparot is the transferences of a persons sins to a rooster (for a man) and a hen (for a woman). Another High Holiday transference is Tashlich, were people cast their sins off through pieces of bread tossed into moving water. And of course bedikat chameitz before Passover is also seen as a transference, when a person searches for leaven in his house and declares any that he doesn't find not his.

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The parsha then speaks about a “plague on a house.” The Torah seems to say that a house can also contract tzara’at (skin disease). If tzara’at is found in a house that piece of the house is removed or replaced.

The Rabbis seemed to link skin or house disease with evil speak or to someone who has spoken evil against another.