

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : מצורע

1. This Sidra continues the Laws of Tzoraas and describes the procedure of Taharoh of the person stricken with Tzoraas. When the marks on the afflicted person's skin begin to disappear, the Kohen goes out to the person's place of isolation to ascertain that the Tzoraas has in fact healed.
2. The procedure of Taharoh of a Metzora (that is, a person stricken with Tzora'as) is highly symbolic and by our careful study of all the laws we are able to gain an understanding of the lessons of Tzora'as, the better to know how HaShem wants us to live our lives in full harmony and real fulfilment.
3. The Metzora is commanded to take two Kosher birds (that is, birds of a Kosher species) a piece of cedar wood and a bundle of Ayzov (possibly hyssop) together with a tongue of scarlet wool.
4. The constant twittering and chirruping of the birds is to remind the Metzora that his affliction was due to his speaking disparagingly about others, that he did not control his speech but spoke Loshon HoRa. The cedar, being a very tall tree, serves as a reminder that Tzora'as comes upon those who hold themselves aloof and are haughty. Such people think that others are less than themselves and that it doesn't matter that their feelings are hurt by being spoken about maliciously. The Ayzov, on the other hand, is a small plant and reminds the Metzora to be humble. The lesson of humility is reinforced by the colour of the scarlet tongue of wool, for the dye is obtained from a lowly worm. The birds taken for the Metzora are of a type that cannot be domesticated: the first bird is slaughtered over a newly-made earthenware vessel containing water taken from a constant wellspring. Immediately after its slaughter it is buried (for it is forbidden to derive any benefit from it) signifying that such anti-social and destructive instincts as shown by the Metzora must be laid low completely if a person is to be a member of the harmonious Jewish society that the Torah intends. The second bird is sent away from the City, symbolically teaching that there is no place in our society for those with a loose tongue or who conduct themselves in an anti-social manner — this bird will be sent away from our midst.
5. The piece of cedar wood, the Ayzov and the tongue of wool are tied into a bundle (using the long end of the tongue of scarlet wool) and, together with the live bird, are dipped into the spring water (which has in it some of the blood of the slaughtered bird) and some of this water is sprinkled upon the Metzora. All this brings forcibly to the mind of the Metzora how all of life (represented by the spring-water mingled with the life-blood of the slaughtered bird) ranging from the lowest plant life (represented by the Ayzov) to the highest (the cedar) and from the smallest animal (the red dye obtained from the worm) to Man himself, and all the animals that are within his service (the wool from the domesticated sheep) indeed, even that which is not alive but is inorganic (the new, specially-made earthenware vessel) — all of it, is to be lived and utilized in accordance with HaShem's Law of social harmony.

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6. The Metzora may now rejoin the social community again — but only to an extent. For although he is re-admitted from his state of excommunication, he must nevertheless remain, to a degree, outside of his own home (family life is forbidden to him) for he is still barred from the Mikdash of HaShem. As long as his Taharoh process is not completed, he is excluded from the Mikdash, and so long is he denied the full enjoyment of a warm and affectionate homecoming. For he who would undermine the well-being of the happy home of his neighbour by his evil tongue or anti-social behaviour cannot be allowed to settle quietly into his own home. Only when he has mended his ways and also achieved atonement from HaShem for the discord and harm he has brought upon others does the Mikdash open its gates to him and then the door to his own home opens to him, too.
7. On the seventh day all his hair must be shaved off again (it is shaved off the first time at the beginning of the Taharoh process) he must again wash his clothes, and then immerse himself again in the Mikveh. (Hair represents the protection of the skin from exposure to the outer world: let the Metzora now resolve to give up his selfish, uncaring attitude to others and learn to feel more sensitive about their feelings just as he too now feels exposed and unprotected. And he washes his clothes, that other symbol of Man's protection from the outside, and symbolically thus washes away the isolating shell of selfishness in which he used to wrap himself, and he purifies himself in the Mikveh Taharoh.)
8. Having thus prepared himself to re-enter the community of HaShem's People, he brings his Korbannos on the eighth day. The whole process of Taharoh completed as HaShem commands, HaShem grants him atonement and he is again admitted to the Mikdash, a reborn person, properly aware of his responsibilities towards others and appreciative of his high calling as a member of HaShem's holy Nation.
9. The Sidra continues with the Taharoh process for a house (in reality, that is, for the family) that had Tzora'as, and there follow some laws concerning other forms of Tum'oh of the person, and how Taharoh is to be achieved in those cases.
10. In this Sidra are given also some of the Laws of Family Purity. By observing these Laws of Holiness, which are the very foundation upon which the Jewish Nation is built, we sanctify our homes and families and bring upon them and all future generations of Jewish children the blessing and serene joy of HaShem's grace and goodness. These laws are of such paramount importance to the Jewish People that a community must sell its only Sefer Torah if this is the only way it can pay for the building of a Mikveh Taharoh. For it is the Mikveh that HaShem, in His Infinite Wisdom, has decreed to be absolutely fundamental to Taharoh. Only by carefully observing these Laws of Family Purity in all their details can the Jewish home become a miniature Mikdash to the Holy One, blessed be He, and become a worthy dwelling-place for His Divine Presence. The fortunate members of such a household blessed of HaShem are able to appreciate and enjoy HaShem's greatest blessings of true happiness and spiritual joy and harmony as no other people on earth.

For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra מצורע please go to HAFTORAHs.