

## This Week's Parshah - Parshas Metzora

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of

Feiga *bas* Ephrayim *a''h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

### Seeing Things

This week's *parshah* continues to discuss the laws and procedures of the *metzora*, the individual afflicted with the skin condition known as *tzara'as*. Last week's *parshah*, Tazria, dealt with *tzara'as* contracted by a person or even an article of clothing; an added dimension in this week's *parshah* is *tzara'as* affecting the walls of one's house.

#### The *Kohein* Will See You Now...

One feature, which all forms of *tzara'as* share, is the examination carried out by the *kohein* to determine the status of the afflicted person/clothing/house. Based on his scrutiny, he will declare the subject ritually fit or impure and issue the relevant instructions.

Maseches Negaim is the tractate dedicated to the elucidation of these *halachos*. In discussing details pertaining to the priestly examiner, the Mishnah states the following (*Negaim* 2:3):

כֹּהֵן הַסּוֹמֵא בְּאַחַת מְעֵינָיו, אוֹ שֶׁכֶּהָה מְאוּר עֵינָיו, לֹא יִרְאֶה אֶת הַנִּגְעִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר לְכֹל מְרֹאֵה עֵינֵי הַכֹּהֵן.

“A *kohein* who is either blind in one eye, or whose vision is weak, cannot serve in the capacity of examining afflictions, as it says (*Vayikra* 13:12), ‘to the whole of the *kohein*’s vision’ (indicating a requirement for his vision to be completely functional).”

The requirement for a clear-eyed *kohein* gives rise to a fairly common issue: what about the older members whose vision, by and large, is not what it once was (or any far- or near-sighted *kohein* for that matter)? Now, while the immediate vision problem can be rectified with a good pair of bifocals or the like, the question remains: *is a kohein authorized to examine tzara'as through glasses?*

#### Through the Window

Why should one think that seeing through the lenses of glasses does not qualify as “vision”? The truth is, we do find elsewhere that even transparent glass may be considered an impediment. One area where this is manifest is in the laws of *bedikas chometz* – to search for leavened products to facilitate their pre-Pesach eradication. The search is supposed to be conducted at night and by candlelight. Even if, for whatever reason, the search will be conducted during the daytime before the onset of the holiday (i.e., it wasn't done the night before), one still cannot rely on the sunlight and must search his house with a candle. An exception mentioned by the Gemara would be an aperture in the roof (and, by extension, a window); when searching the area directly opposite these entities, one may rely on the extensive sunlight they provide. However, there is an exception to the exception: that is, when searching opposite the window, one can discard the candle only if the aperture or window *does not contain glass*; if they do have glass panes, however, one can no longer rely on the natural light but must resort to

candlelight (*Mishnah Berurah* 433:7).

In any event, we do find – in this instance at least – that even clear glass serves as an impediment of sorts, apparently minimizing the quality of the daylight that passes through. Would this also be a factor for the *kohein*-examiner? Or would his ability to see clearly be considered sufficient for purposes of examining possible *tzara'as*, regardless of the “unnatural” quality of his sight?

The issue is raised by the *Tiferes Yisrael*, the Mishnah commentator (*Nega'im, ibid., in the “Boaz” section, §4*). He points to a number of other sight-related practices in which glasses don't seem to detract from their fulfillment. For example, aside from the numerous *berachos* (benedictions) one recites upon partaking of food, there are also blessings that are said when viewing certain noteworthy sights: mountains, oceans, lightning, a cemetery, etc. We do not find (he asserts) a restriction placed on bespectacled individuals; even they may recite these blessings. Apparently, then, seeing through glasses is also “seeing.” Similarly, the *Magen Avraham* rules that one may recite *Kiddush Levanah* (sanctification of the moon), even if viewing the moon through clear glass (*Orach Chaim* 426:1).

### What's in a Glass?

It may very well be that the issue boils down to how to understand a Talmudic passage dealing with the laws of *kiddush hachodesh* (sanctification of the new month). Determining the new month depends on the testimony of witnesses who claim to have sighted the new moon. The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah 24a*) states that the testimony is rejected if the moon was viewed through an “*ashashis*” (glass).

What is the nature of this “*ashashis*”? From Rashi (*ibid.*) it appears that we are dealing with a mirror of sorts – that is, some object that captured a reflection of the moon; the witnesses viewed only this reflection, not the moon itself. Thus, the Gemara would seem not to have any bearing on the case of the bespectacled *kohein*; he, at least, directly viewed the actual *tzara'as* (albeit through the lenses of his glasses).

However, the Ritva there interprets the “*ashashis*” of that Gemara along the lines of a conventional window pane; that is, although viewing the moon directly, seeing the moon through the window is not deemed actual “seeing.” As such, a *kohein* with glasses would likewise be seemingly disqualified for *tzara'as* examination.

Indeed, the *Tiferes Yisrael* – based on the Gemara in Rosh Hashanah – concludes that glasses *are* a problem (at least insofar as viewing *tzara'as* is concerned). As support, he cites a Tosefta in *Nega'im* that discusses the examination of *tzara'as* afflicting a house. The Tosefta states that the *kohein* may view the *tzara'as* through the window as long as he first opens the window. Presumably, this window was covered by a glass pane; nevertheless, the *kohein* was required to open the window in order to obtain a totally unobstructed view of the *tzara'as* afflicting the walls inside.

Regarding other practices in effect today that may be affected by this issue: as always, consult your local competent *halachic* authority. (Even if he wears glasses.)