



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 17 | Metzora | Sichah 1

The etymology of the word “*tenuch*” according to Rashi and the mystical significance of the *kohen’s* application of blood to the ear of the leper.

The kohen shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the kohen shall put it on the ridge (tenuch) of the right ear of him who is being cleansed. (Vayikra 14:14)

Rashi: “תנוך [the ridge].” תנוך is the middle wall of the ear. The etymology of the word תנוך is unknown to me, and the interpreters translate it as *tendron*.

Rashi explains the meaning of *tenuch* in *Shemos 29:22*. Why does he need to explain it again? And what is gained by saying that he does not know the etymology of the word, but that the interpreters translate it *tendron*?

In saying, “it is unknown to me,” Rashi refers to the definition of this word offered by *Toras Kohanim*, which, in his opinion, does not derive from the plain meaning of the verse. He is compelled to negate this commentary to contrast with his many other comments in this *parshah*, which rely on *Toras Kohanim’s* interpretation.

Toras Kohanim explains that *tenuch* is related to two words: 1) *Toch*, meaning, “within.” The letter *nun* which is added in our verse is extra, in keeping with common Biblical Hebrew. 2) *Noch*, etymologically similar to the word *anach* in the phrase, “a wall made by a plumbline (*anach*)” (*Amos 7:7*) implying height. The absence of the *alef* is, again, common in biblical Hebrew.

Because *tenuch* contains both meanings, “within,” and “height,” *Toras Kohanim* concludes that the word does not refer to the highest part of the ear, or to the innermost wall of the ear, but rather, to the middle ridge of the ear.

Rashi rejects this etymological analysis, at least according to the plain meaning of the Torah, for two reasons: 1) According to the plain meaning of the Torah, words with and without a *vav* actually *do* have different meanings. They are not interchangeable. So *tenuch*, which has an extra *vav*, is not a stylistically different version of *toch*. 2) The word *anach* refers to a tool used in the process of building a wall. This tool was simply placed atop the wall, but the word *anach* does not denote “height.”

Instead, Rashi explains that the meaning of *tenuch* is clarified by the “interpreters,” as in, *dream interpreters*. An interpreter links the symbolic images a person sees in a dream to something in the worldly reality. Seven fat cows become seven years of plenty, etc. The wording “interpreters” links the words *toch* and *anach* to *tenuch* to interpret *tenuch* to mean *the middle ridge of the ear*. This is not the plain meaning of the word; it is an inventive interpretation. Similarly, the “interpreters” see a resemblance between *tenuch* and the Old French word *tendron*. They both have the consonants *tav*, *nun*, and *vav*. This is another “interpretation” that leads us to understand that *tenuch* means *the ridge middle of the ear*.

The mystical allusion in the Rashi: Kabbalah says that the cause of the leper’s condition is the absence of *chochmah*, of humble dedication to G-d’s mission of living within, and elevating, the world. The leper has the power of *binah*, of deep comprehension of G-d, inspiring in him a longing to leave the world. But without the return to the world inspired by *chochmah*, this longing can become corrupted. It can become a negative longing.

Healing requires two steps: 1) Comprehension and longing must be adjusted so they can respond to the mandate to be grounded and to return to the world. 2) The *light* of *chochmah* has to be introduced. The person

must return to this world. This is why the leper is “brought before the *kohen*,” and the *kohen* “leaves the camp” to see the leper. The *kohen* represents the light of *chochmah*.

These two steps are alluded to in the verse, “*The priest shall put it on the... ear.*” The ear is emblematic of comprehension. The *kohen*, emblematic of humility/*chochmah*, must initiate a spiritual flow to, and influence, “the ear” — comprehension.

Because *chochmah* is beyond the comprehension of *binah*, the way it influences *binah* is, as Rashi says, “unknown to me.”

Before this infusion of humility, however, there first must be an adjustment of *binah*/longing itself. This is the work of the “interpreters,” who creatively integrate the comprehension and passion of *binah* with the task of actually serving G-d within the world.