

Our double Parsha this week of Tazria-Metzora deals with the process of diagnosing and treating the malady of 'Tzaraat'. While many translate this as leprosy, the Torah gives us very specific guidelines which help us to see that while there is a physical manifestation involved, the cause of this disease is spiritual rather than medical. The Rabbis discuss the various sins which may lead to a person contracting this disease and the most famous of them is 'lashon hara' or speaking disparagingly about another person.

In the days of the Temple, when a person would notice a skin abrasion, rather than consulting with their local dermatologist, they would seek out their local Kohein. The Kohein would examine the 'patient' and if he indeed confirmed that the person were infected with tzaraat- even two hairs worth of their skin- the infected would be isolated from the community. Many suggest that this is a very fitting punishment. By speaking negatively about someone else, he attempted to isolate his fellow from the community. His punishment is that he must feel the pain of being separated from the community and to bear the brunt of the negative attention.

There is one seemingly odd detail added in about the laws of Tzaraat. In Chapter 13:13. We are told that if the Tzaraat covers the entire body of the afflicted, he is actually declared pure and is not isolated. If a miniscule spot of Tzaraat is enough to excommunicate, why is one pure if their entire body is covered? Rav Hirsch suggests that the reason he is declared pure and sent back into society is that we have lost hope for him. When someone has a small blemish, it is possible for them to use their time in isolation to reflect on what they have done and to make the proper corrections to their behavior. However, if a person is so far gone that the Tzaraat covers their entire body, no amount of isolation will help them- they are clearly indifferent to their moral shortcomings.

I would like to offer a different perspective. When we disparage of another human being, it is often because we are 'zooming in' on one aspect of their whole being. We see one action, one flaw, one negative moment and we confidently judge the person as a whole based on that one aspect. However, when we 'zoom out' and look at the whole being, the picture changes drastically. We see their strengths and their weaknesses, we see that their faults are not as accentuated when viewed together with all of their positive qualities. Perhaps the Torah is telling us that we run the risk of isolating ourselves from society, and ultimately breaking down our communities, when we focus only on one aspect of another person. But when we take in the whole of another person, even if there is bad there, we will be able to pass a more favorable judgment and live together with them.

This week we have commemorated and honored the lives of our holy brothers and sisters who sacrificed everything so that we could live freely in our Holy Land of Israel. We also celebrated all that we have accomplished in the last 67 years and came together as a proud community of Israel supporters. In the world there are throngs of people- Jews included- who need to learn the lesson of our Parsha. They see one aspect of our country and judge it harshly. They spread disparaging ideas about Israel and cause people to turn away from us. If they would take a step back and see the whole picture- focus on the beauty of our land and what her existence has contributed to the world in such a short time- they would surely walk away with a different attitude.

May we all judge each other favorably and see each other as whole beings. May the world 'zoom out' when viewing Israel and our people and see us for accomplishments and beauty.

Shabbat Shalom,

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