

SELF-HELP

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

In defining the laws of tzora'as, the disease that afflicts gossips with a white skin blemish, the Torah outlines a detailed process in which the plague is contracted, diagnosed and cured. The afflicted, one who has contracted tzora'as, is referred to as a metzora, and the Talmud tells us that the disease of tzora'as comes from the sin of slander. As soon as the potential metzora notices the discoloration of the skin, he must immediately visit a kohen for spiritual counsel. The kohen is the only one who is able to either declare a state of impurity by officially acknowledging the disease, dismiss the initial diagnosis, or announce the recuperation. Of course, one who has indulged in the evils of scandal and gossip would be better served by a priest, and it is the kohen who shall guide the metzora through the healing process.

If, after an incubation period that follows the initial observation, the tzora'as subsides, the afflicted patient is declared tahor and may return back to the camp from which he has been expelled. In the second of this week's two portions, the Torah reviews the healing process, which involves, among other rites, offerings and immersion in a mikveh. But before any of this is done the Torah tells us that the "kohen shall go to the outside of the camp and shall look (at the afflicted one) and behold the tzara'as affliction has been healed from the metzora" (Leviticus 14:3).

A number of commentators are intrigued by the Torah's extra verbiage. It would have been enough to state, "and behold the tzara'as affliction has been healed." Why must the Torah add the words, "from the afflicted metzora"? Of course, the wound was healed "from the metzora." Surely it was not healed from the kohen!

A fellow decided to go out drinking after work. At 2 a.m., the bar closed and he went home drunk. He tip-toed up the stairs, tripped and fell head over heels, landing on his face, breaking the nearly empty pint bottle that fell from his back-pocket. The broken glass cut him on his cheek and forehead. Being so drunk, he did not immediately realize he was injured.

A few minutes later, as he was undressing, he noticed blood, so he checked himself in the mirror. He repaired the damage as best he could under the circumstances, and he went to bed.

The next morning, his head throbbed, and his injury was painful. He hunkered under the covers trying to think up some good story when his wife came into the bedroom.

"Well, you surely must have been drunk last night," she said. "I thought you promised to stop drinking!"

"I worked late," he said, "and I came home after you were asleep."

"That's a lie," she replied. "What are the cuts on your face all about?"

"Oh, I tripped on the way out of the office," replied the man as he felt the dried blood on his cheek and forehead. He felt for the band-aids, but there were none. He thought that he had bandaged and applied ointment to the wounds.

His wife laughed cynically. "You were very drunk last night, and I won't put up with it any longer!"

"What makes you so sure I got drunk last night, anyway?" he countered.

"Well," she replied, "my first big clue was when I got up this morning and found first aid cream and a bunch of band-aids stuck all over the mirror."

Perhaps the words, "healed from the afflicted metzarah," teach us a lesson about every affliction that stems from a spiritual malady. There is nowhere to find the cure but from the afflicted himself. External salves are only band-aid solutions that do not affect the core problem. If the issue that caused the affliction in the case of the metzarah was immoderate and unacceptable gossip then the remedy must come from within. There is no excuse, nowhere to place the blame but on the metzarah himself and the only way the plague will heal is when the "tzara's affliction has been healed from the metzarah."

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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